

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE ENGLISH NOVEL
1843-1861

Donna Kathleen Boyd

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews



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Andrew Dickens Dahlburg

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree
of M.Phil. at the University of
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I hereby declare that this thesis is based upon the results of research carried out by me, that the thesis is my composition, and that it has not previously been presented for a higher degree. The research has been carried out in the Department of English at the University of St. Andrews.

I was admitted as a research student in the University of St. Andrews under Ordinance No.12 in October 1982, and enrolled as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in May 1983. I have undertaken full-time research on the subject of this thesis in the Department of English under the supervision of Mr. P. V. Mallett.

Andrew Dickens *Dahlburg*

I certify that Andrew Dahlburg has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution of the University Court pertaining to the degree of Master of Philosophy and that he is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

...
24. April 1985

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For my parents

Abstract

The nineteenth century was a period of turbulent change, marked by the growth of large cities, factories and the railway. Led by an enterprising middle class Britain became the 'workshop of the world'. The new conditions produced enormous wealth but at the same time also created an impoverished working class which was forced to labour for long hours in the factory and to live in the cheapest dwellings where the lack of sanitary provisions contributed to the spreading of disease. The gross inequalities between the rich and poor, expressed by the phrase the 'two nations', became the focus of a national debate.

This thesis discusses the work of five writers who responded to the social and ethical implications of industrialism; Thomas Carlyle, the foremost of Victorian sages, and four novelists - Benjamin Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Kingsley and Charles Dickens. In the first chapter I discuss the process whereby Britain became the first industrial nation and try to place these writers in a proper historical context. The ideas and influence of Thomas Carlyle are explored in Chapter Two. Carlyle is an important thinker because he was one of the first Victorians to address those problems of industrialism which he termed the 'condition of England' question. Part of the argument of my thesis is to demonstrate the extent of Carlyle's influence, which explains why he receives special attention throughout this work. Chapter Three examines Disraeli's trilogy Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred, discussing the way he saw and presented the working class and sought to develop a new role for the aristocracy in nineteenth century Britain. Chapter Four examines two novels by Mrs. Gaskell, Mary Barton and North and South; there it is argued that Mrs. Gaskell's Unitarian views and her position as a

minister's wife allowed her to present the poor more sympathetically than any other of the social novelists. Charles Kingsley came to consider the 'condition of England' question through his involvement with the Christian Socialist movement and from his parish work in Eversley. His novels Yeast and Alton Locke have the added interest of dealing with both the rural and the urban poor, and are studied in Chapter Five. Dickens's novels all deal with social questions in varying degrees. In Chapter Six I examine Hard Times, his most direct attempt to deal with industrial society, and Great Expectations, which deals most profoundly with the question of wealth and success in relation to the moral character of mid-Victorian society. In the conclusion I try to assess the ability of these middle class writers to come to grips with working class life, and to establish the impact they had on their contemporaries.

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Chapter One

Introduction : An Age of Change

The social and political novelists to be considered in this study all wrote directly and explicitly about the industrial conflicts of the 1830's, 1840's and 1850's. Although different in background, these writers were united in their attack against some of the harsh social changes brought about by industrialisation. Each writer used the novel to voice specific objections and propose solutions ; each owed an intellectual debt to the writings of Thomas Carlyle. Properly to examine these writers, one must understand the details of the industrial debate as well as something about the intellectual tradition in which they took part. Therefore we shall examine some of the major changes in the period.

The 1830's and the 1840's were times of unparalleled social and economic development in Britain. The change from a mainly agrarian to a chiefly industrial economy; the increase in population, and its movement from the country into the cities; the rise of steam power, and its utilisation both in factories and the railways; these things transformed British life almost beyond recognition.

The process of industrialisation occurred in two major phases.¹ The first phase, 1780-1840, brought major changes in agricultural techniques, as the application of scientific principles made farming both easier and more efficient. New machinery like the rotherham plough, the seed drill, horse drawn hoe and threshing machine all speeded up planting and harvesting. Land enclosure facilitated the process of change by clearing over six million acres, a quarter of all cultivated land.

The second phase of industrialisation, 1840-1895, was a revolution in manufacturing and brought in social changes the like of which had never been seen before. This phase was hallmarked by the use of steam power which extended from the factory to the railway. The steam engine became the emblem of the new age and gave man a Promethean power by which he could transform the world.

Steam power was such a revolutionary and liberating force because it meant that factories were no longer dependent on water power, a dependence which limited factory construction to sites besides fast running streams. Steam power was gradually applied throughout manufacturing industries. Between 1830 and the mid 1840's the number of spindles doubled and the number of power looms quadrupled. The sheer material results arising from the new power were impressive and unprecedented : coal production, for example, doubled during this time.² Even a regretful Carlyle had to admit: 'We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.'³ The new technology spread and manufacturers benefited by the specialisation brought in with large scale production. By 1870 Britain produced a third of the world's manufactured goods.⁴

The age of steam also ushered in the railways, and during this period, and particularly the 1840's, Britain laid the backbone of her railway system. Phenomenal railway growth was dictated by tycoons like George Brassey and George Hudson who successfully combined wealth and ingenuity : in the 1840's alone railway track increased from two to five thousand miles. The railway was itself a modernising force, and contributed to the overall industrial acceleration by linking large

cities. Increasing the speed of transportation to as much as fifty miles per hour meant that the canal system had a major competitor in moving materials to the bulging manufacturing centres.

Cities, like trains, were regarded as one of the hallmarks of the age. One obvious reason was the increase in population. Between 1801 and 1851 the population rose from eleven million to twenty one million. Robert Vaughan, a Unitarian minister, said in 1843 that his era was more than anything an era of cities.⁵ The fact was, there were more cities than ever before and they were larger. The concentration of the population came as the result of several factors. Employment in the factory attracted people either to or in the direction of the city. This was a natural consequence of the rise of the population and the growth of factories and the railway. In Manchester, Mrs. Gaskell's city, the booming cotton industry had caused the population to increase six times in size in only sixty years. Between 1831 and 1871 the number of cities with a population of over a hundred thousand increased from five to twenty three. More significantly, the increase in the number of cities reflected the movement of the population away from agriculture. At the mid point of the century more people were living and working in the city than the country.

These social and demographic changes occasioned a prolonged debate about the condition of the nation, a debate in which the social novelists played a major part. J. S. Mill gave a classic account of the Victorian age in his essay 'Bentham' (1838) where he divided the philosophic world into the opposing traditions of the pragmatist Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and the conservative S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834). Bentham was the architect of Utilitarianism, a rational and numeric

philosophy which believed all human behaviour was prompted by the desire to pursue pleasure and to avoid pain. Legislative reform was Bentham's specific task and he proposed a massive social reform by applying his pain-pleasure principle to society and government. Utilitarianism sought to bring legislation which would ensure 'the greatest good for the greatest number', and under Bentham's influence significant steps were taken towards universal education and representative government. Although Bentham's principles were particularly associated with political reform, his ideas regarding efficiency were widely applied to many ways of thinking. The Free Traders of Manchester pleaded for non-interference in the marketplace. Government officials sought to eliminate outdated and costly practices. Greedy businessmen adopted the ideas of self interest to justify their pursuit of high material profits while keeping wages at the lowest level. For all their differences, Evangelicals and Utilitarians were agreed on the individual's responsibility to improve his condition by hard work, thrift and temperate living. To the social novelists, however, as to Thomas Carlyle, the Utilitarian way of thinking posed a danger : to them it seemed that the commitment to profit, and to individualism, threatened to erode many cherished traditions and social ties.

The social novelists saw Bentham as closely linked with classical 'laissez-faire' economics founded by Adam Smith (1723-1790). Like Bentham, Smith believed men were predominantly economic beings driven by self-interest. In The Wealth of Nations (1776) Smith wrote: 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard for their own interest.'⁶ Again like Bentham, Smith thought the ideal society was one where the individual would be able to pursue his own interests, and therefore a

free market was required. In an unobstructed society 'the invisible hand' would ensure the general welfare. A good example of how Bentham's political ideas of efficiency blended in with those of economics was Smith's principle of the division of labour which he used to demonstrate the material benefits of specialisation; equally characteristic of the opponents of laissez-faire was Ruskin's reply in 'The Nature of Gothic' (1853) that it was not the labour that was divided, but the men, and indeed the society of which they were a part.⁷

Bentham and Smith were at the heart of a new set of ideas which opponents came to call the 'dismal science'. Proponents of the 'laissez-faire' school of economics especially repugnant to the social novelists were Thomas Malthus (1776-1834) and David Ricardo (1772-1823) whose works appeared to outline a deterministic and uncaring social philosophy. Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population (1798) gloomily stated that the increase in population would outstrip the increasing capacity for food production so that world famine could only be avoided by wars, disease and 'moral restraint'. Such laws lessened the value of human life. Benjamin Jowett said he heard one political economist say that 'he feared the famine of 1848 in Ireland would not kill more than a million people, and that would scarcely be enough to do much good'.⁸ Ricardo's iron law of wages provided another element in the 'dismal science'. Following Malthus's work on population, Ricardo extended these harsh laws to workers' wages in his Principles of Political Economy (1817). The fixed 'wage fund' theory pessimistically stated that the workers' wages would only increase if the population declined. 'The natural price of labour is that price which is necessary to enable the labourers, one with another, to subsist and to perpetuate their race, without either increase or diminution.'⁹

The economic doctrines of 'laissez-faire' led to radical changes in the working habits of the people. The manufacturers used these 'scientific' principles to justify low wages : more generous treatment would only swell the numbers of the poor, and ultimately increase their problems. These arguments were repugnant to the social novelists, but they found a more sympathetic hearing among the liberals and 'philosophic radicals', who emphasised the material benefits brought by industrialism. George Richardson Porter's Progress of the Nation (1847) demonstrated the country's steady economic improvement. H. T. Buckle's celebrated History of Civilisation in England (1857, 1861) also proclaimed the benefits arising from material progress. Samuel Smiles's Self-Help (1859) popularised the principle of self-improvement which he saw as leading to cultural and material well being. But it was Lord Macaulay (1800-1859) who was the most eloquent apologist for industrialisation:

'The labouring classes of this island, though they have their grievances and distresses, some produced by their own improvidence, some by the errors of their rulers, are on the whole better off as to physical comforts than the inhabitants of any equally extensive district of the old world. For this very reason, suffering is more acutely felt and more loudly bewailed here than elsewhere ... We must confess ourselves unable to find any satisfactory record of any great nation, past or present, in which the working classes have been in a more comfortable situation than in England during the last thirty years ... The serving man, the artisan, and the husbandman, have a more copious and palatable supply of food, better clothing, and better furniture ... Yet is the country poorer than in 1790? We firmly believe that, in spite of all the misgovernment of her rulers, she has been almost constantly becoming richer and richer. Now and then there has been a stoppage, now and then a short retrogression; but as to the general tendency there can be no doubt. A single breaker may recede; but the tide is evidently coming in.'

For all Macaulay's eloquence, those who benefited most from industrialism were not the working classes but their masters : the aristocracy, the gentry, and the new middle class. The aristocracy and the gentry were, and remained, a small but powerful group, who owned three-quarters of all cultivated land, but mid-Victorian Britain was the great age of the middle class, and they benefited more than any other section of the nation. The new conditions created by industrialism were advantageous to them because the developing industries enabled individuals like Sir William Armstrong to obtain great wealth and to live lavishly both in city and country. They consolidated their new social standing by developing a class philosophy built round the church, the family and hard work. Having economic security, they began to redefine, to their advantage, ideas of propriety and gentility. Middle class families now began sending their sons to public schools to groom them properly for University and the new professions. Dickens's life was a good case in point. His literary fame enabled him to climb the social scale and to send one of his sons to Cambridge University. Perhaps most significant of all was the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League, a massive political organisation which actively stated the middle class position.

If the working classes did profit from the Industrial Revolution, this fact was not clear to many of them at the time. The vast social changes helped spread the idea of the two nations, one rich and the other hopelessly poor. The workman's labour was quickly becoming obsolete in an industrial society and these poor workers were cruelly caught between the vice of the new machines and the increasing practice of farmers who dismissed their workers in the winter months. The result was record unemployment. Henry Mayhew whose 'London Labour and

London Poor' (1849-1851) shocked the conscience of his readers in the Morning Chronicle, believed that only a third of the working class had full time employment, another third part time work and the final third no work at all. Especially during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the lives of working men and women were haphazardly governed by unstable wage and food prices, and when harvests were bad or the economy in a trough they suffered extreme hardship. Inevitably the chasm between classes deepened; as the journalist William Howitt observed in 1838: 'What a mighty space lies between the palace and the cottage in this country! ay, what a mighty space between the mansion of the private gentleman and the hut of the labourer on his estate!'¹¹ Industrialism and the development of the machine forged new patterns of life and work habits for the labourer but at the same time these transformations swept away many cherished traditions and altered men's working relationships.

Some contemporary observers, including Southey and Carlyle, sought to define the new conditions by comparing them with the past. Pre-Industrial Britain was a mediaeval one which functioned to preclude the notion of change. Agriculture was the chief means of employment with over half the population working on the land. Life revolved round the estate and the line 'a rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate' was for many the natural order of society. Most men were virtual serfs who lived under a patriarchal regime. But (so at least it was supposed by Southey and Carlyle) the aristocracy took a paternalistic attitude and the labourers naturally looked to the gentry as their leaders who also took care of them. Many landowners built dwellings for their workers and the worker also traded part of his wage for a cottage and plot of grass where his cow could graze. Against this image of social

harmony, Carlyle set his account of modern industrial Britain:

'It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends;... Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. The sailor furls his sail, and lays down his oar; and bids a strong unwearied servant, on vaporous wings, bear him through the waters ... There is no end to machinery;... For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances.'¹²

In the manufacturing towns there was an entirely new pattern of life. The city became a prison for the worker because his life was limited to the distance between his home and the factory. The following extract from a sullen worker from Manchester in 1833 revealed how many felt imprisoned:

'Have we not seen the commons of our fathers enclosed by insolvent cupidity-our sports converted into crimes-our holidays into fast days? The green grass and the healthful hayfield are shut out from our path. The whistling of birds is not for us-our melody is the deafening noise of the engine. The merry fiddle and the humble dance will send us to the treadmill. We eat the worst food, drink the worst drink-our raiment, our houses, our everything, bear signs of poverty, and we are gravely told that this must be out lot.'¹³

A young Friedrich Engels had the same impressions about London. London was a place where one could 'roam for hours without leaving the built-up area without seeing the slightest sign of the approach of open country'.¹⁴

The impersonal conditions of city life further contributed to a sense of alienation. The workers were robbed of normal interaction

because they were too tired to do anything but rest after their long hours of work. Carlyle was able to capture the soulless sense of the city:

'The men and women around me, even speaking with me, were but Figures; I had, practically, forgotten that they were alive, that they were not merely automatic. In the midst of their crowded streets and assemblages, I walked solitary; and (except as it was my own heart, not another's, that I kept devouring) savage also, as the tiger in his jungle.'¹⁵

The greatest problem for the cities was their unplanned structure. Housing for the working class was usually made of the cheapest materials and built in areas where drainage and sanitation were poor. Such lodgings were often built back to back with hardly any ventilation or sanitary provisions. Other workers, too poor to pay rent, lived a transient existence in cheap or sordid lodging houses.

The worst examples of poor housing were found among the thousands of Irish immigrants who had come to Britain hoping to find work. Penniless, these poor people were forced to take whatever housing was on offer. Thousands of Irishmen lived like animals in cellars in all the major cities. Here is the description of a dwelling in Leeds:

'I have been in one of these damp cellars, without the slightest drainage, every drop of wet and every morsel of dirt and filth having to be carried up into the street; two corded frames for beds, overlaid with sacks for five persons; scarcely anything in the room else to sit on but a stool, or a few bricks; the floor, in many places, absolutely wet; a pig in the corner also; and in a street where filth of all kinds had accumulated for years. In another house, where no rent had been paid for years by reason of apparent inability to do it, I found a father and mother and their two boys, both under the age of sixteen years, the parents sleeping on similar corded frames, and the two boys upon

straw, on the floor upstairs; never changing their clothes from week's end, working in the dusty department of a flax mill, and existing upon coffee and bread.'16

Nor were conditions significantly better for those who remained agricultural workers in the country. Workers' wages were at the mercy of the farmer. In Scotland farmworkers lived in turf houses where they also sheltered their livestock.

The new emphasis on material production and the uninhibited marketplace created demeaning working conditions. Employment in factories abolished old patterns and created the cash-nexus between employer and worker which both Carlyle and Karl Marx criticised. Factories brought in impersonal conditions in comparison to the workers' previous outdoor work. Factories broke down family life by taking work out of the home. No member of the family was exempt from factory work. The father's role was diminished because the low wages forced other members of the family to procure employment as well. Factories brought in the tyranny of the clock and the whole life of the working man now revolved round getting up for or going home from work.

Factory work also imposed dull specialisation and forced the worker to follow the most mundane of routines. Conditions within the factory were unnecessarily harsh because of unshielded dangerous equipment and a strict fine system which often fined workers for such trivial offences as whistling or accidentally leaving waste on the floor. The reports of the social legislator J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth in 1832 revealed how factories were often places of cruel tyranny:

'Whilst the engine runs the people must work - men, women, and children are yoked together with iron and steam. The animal machine-breakable in the

best case, subject to a thousand sources of suffering - is chained fast to the iron machine, which knows no suffering and no weariness.'¹⁷

The family-oriented occupation was one of the casualties of the Industrial Revolution. The classic example was that of the hand-loom weavers in the cotton and woollen industries who were made redundant due to the utilisation and perfection of the power-loom which Edmund Cartwright had invented in 1785. Engels noted that the weavers were the most oppressed of those who had to compete against machinery.¹⁸ The hand-loom weavers were no match for the tireless machines. In a twenty year period between 1818 and 1833 the number of power-looms increased from 2,400 to over 100,000.¹⁹ What little work the loom weavers had left was made ancillary to cash payment. Weavers' work was subjected to a piece rate and was symptomatic of their changing status from artisans to mere workers.

There was no better example of the changes in the workers' position than the reform of the Poor Law which dismantled the benevolent parish system of relief and replaced it with the more economically sound but inhumane workhouse. The workhouse was established with severe conditions with the purpose of discouraging entry. Carlyle equated this to the old practice of ratcatchers : if 'paupers are made miserable, paupers will needs decline in multitude'.²⁰ Dickens brilliantly satirised the New Poor Law in the early chapters of Oliver Twist (1837) but in reality it could be far worse. The most notorious example was the Andover workhouse where hungry workers attempted to eat the bones and bits of meat they were set to crush. Other social novelists as well as Dickens recognised the failure of the New Poor Law and the brutal suffering of many of the workers. These thinkers were conscious of

individual suffering which could so easily get lost in national statistics. They realised the sense of hopelessness in people like Mary Furley who in 1844 tried to kill herself and her child when faced with the prospect of returning to the workhouse.

The radical tone of the working classes grew out of social oppression and political isolation. The worker had the dubious choice between various types of employment, each equally demeaning. Factory work, sweatshops, mining and agriculture all offered low pay. Politically, labourers felt misled and manipulated by the various political parties. The Tories and the Young England Movement did not appear to offer the workers anything substantial. Nor for that matter did the Free Traders from Manchester, who were linked with the factory system in the workers' minds. Having no voice in government, the working classes finally banded together and formed representative bodies. Later ages looked back on this period as the beginnings of the great labour movements. Early working class movements were on the march during the second quarter of the century. In 1829 cotton spinners from Lancashire formed the Grand Union of All the Operative Spinners. Although the movement did not last longer than a year, it clearly represented the growing political will of the working classes. In 1834 Robert Owen founded the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union which had a membership of half a million in only a few weeks. Owen, the father of British socialism, was anti-capitalistic in his thinking and saw all political problems as the result of limited representation. The ruling authorities were obviously nervous at the swelling ranks of the unions and in that same year they prosecuted a group of agricultural labourers for taking illegal oaths. These were the Tolpuddle martyrs.

The step from Owenism to Chartism was only a matter of time. The Chartists overshadowed all other working class movements and wanted to bring in sweeping political and economic reforms. Only representation in the House of Commons, they argued, would change the unfair system. Chartism was a broad and popular movement and there was disagreement as to whether the six point Charter should be enacted by 'moral' or 'physical' force. The 'moral' force leaders urged mass demonstrations and submitted huge petitions to the government. The advocates of 'physical' force took to rick burnings, pike drilling and torch meetings. The Chartists, having absorbed other movements, gave to the workers a class consciousness and sense of power which they had never had before.

The economic hardships caused many members of the lower classes to turn to violence. In the 'hungry forties' the Chartist movement was revitalised because of widespread unemployment and poverty. In 1844 for example, nearly ten per cent of the population needed assistance of one kind or another from the Poor Law system.²¹ Regular outbreaks of cholera and a mounting sanitation problem exacerbated the national problem and what Alexis de Tocqueville said in France in 1848 was also visibly true in Britain: 'We are sleeping on a volcano.... Do you not see that the earth trembles anew? A wind of revolution blows, the storm is on the horizon.'²²

The Social Novelists

The social novelists were a group of writers who attempted to bridge the gap between the two nations. They were not the only writers from outside the working class to challenge the new conditions; William

Cobbett, S. T. Coleridge, and Robert Southey had all entered the fray to argue, in Southey's words, that industrialism was socially disruptive, 'unwholesome for the body, unprofitable for the mind'.²³ But increasingly the social novelists took on the task of giving a voice in literature to the poor, rural and urban, and of finding some common ground on which rich and poor could meet.

The background of these novelists and their later careers were varied and only Charles Dickens could have been called a full time novelist.²⁴ Charles Kingsley was the Queen's favourite preacher and Benjamin Disraeli her chosen prime minister. Mrs. Gaskell assisted her husband's ministry to the poor in Manchester.

During the second quarter of the Victorian era the role of the novelists and the novel changed. A new relationship developed between the writer and the public which was epitomised by the nation's love affair with Dickens. At the same time novelists became increasingly ready to subordinate their position as entertainers to become investigators of society, in particular of that part of society least known to the middle classes. The social novelists, along with the establishment of the Royal Commissions and the individual efforts by Engels and Mayhew, were part of the middle class effort better to understand the working classes. These investigations were all the more important because of the threat of cholera which spread to all classes, 'to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high'.²⁵ Each of these authors kept abreast of the social conditions in a variety of ways, often representative of the extent of their genuine interest. Disraeli was content to glean his information from a heap of Commission reports. Dickens feverishly paced the dark London streets. Mrs. Gaskell talked

with and listened to the poor. Kingsley was in such earnest for a better social understanding he requested further information from workers. In 1848 he wrote to the Chartist poet Thomas Cooper: '

'I would shed the last drop of my blood for the social and political emancipation of the people of England, as God is my witness; and here are the very young men for whom I would die, fancying me an 'aristocrat'. It is not enough for me that they are mistaken in me. I want to work with them. I want some one like yourself, intimately acquainted with the working class, to give me such an insight into their lives and thoughts, as may enable me to consecrate my powers effectively to their service. For them I have lived for several years. I come to you to ask you if you can tell me how to live more completely for them.'²⁶

The social novelists hoped to inform their readers of the facts underlying the social and political unrest of the times. First and foremost this involved them and their readers in an attempt to perceive the realities of poverty and one aim of this thesis is to examine how far they were able to do so : to consider, for example, their attempts to break free from unnatural class stereotypes to achieve authentic portrayals of the poor. Second they wished to help avert further conflict between the classes, by encouraging greater communication between the two nations of rich and poor. It comes as no surprise that the most famous page from the social novels examined here deals with the theme of the 'two nations' and is from Disraeli's Sybil:

'Well, society may be in its infancy,' said Egremont slightly smiling; 'but, say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed.'

'Which nation?' asked the younger stranger, 'for she reigns over two.'

The stranger paused; Egremont was silent, but looked inquiringly. 'Yes', resumed the younger

'stranger after a moment's interval. 'Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if 'they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.'

'You speak of -' said Egremont, hesitatingly.

'THE RICH AND THE POOR.'²⁷

The role of the novel changed as well. With cheaper methods of publication and wider distribution to an ever growing middle and lower class audience, the novel established itself as the dominant literary form of the age. The social novelists adopted it for their own purposes and tried to use it to influence people's opinions. Social novels of this type appeared in such abundance that a critic from Fraser's Magazine wrote in 1850: 'Whoever has anything to say, or thinks he has ... puts it forthwith into the shape of a novel or tale.'²⁸

While the social novelists found agreement about the urgency of the social situation, their varied religious and political backgrounds and beliefs led them to disagree about the best way to address the questions of social change. Their distinct proposals and various recommendations form the major concern of this thesis. Before discussing the individual social novelists, we must first examine the writings of Thomas Carlyle, which generated the national discussion on 'the condition of England' question and which in turn influenced these writers' social thinking.²⁹

Footnotes to Chapter One

1. E. G. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, The Penguin Economic History of Britain, Volume 3, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp.56-133, provides good information on the two phases of the Industrial Revolution.
2. Barry Supple, 'Material development : the condition of England 1830-1860', The Victorians, edited by Laurence Lerner, Methuen and Co., 1978, p.55.
3. Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' (1829), reprinted in Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, edited by Alan Shelston, Harmondsworth, 1980, p.64.
4. Supple, p.54.
5. R. Vaughan, The Age of Great Cities (1843), selections found in The Idea of the City in Nineteenth Century Britain, edited by B. I. Coleman, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p.87.
6. Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations (1776), selections found in Voices of the Industrial Revolution, edited by John Bowditch and Clement Ramsland, Ann Arbor, 1961, p.18.
7. John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic' (1853), reprinted in The Victorian Prophets, edited by Peter Keating, Fontana, 1981, p.163.
8. Michael Slater (editor), 'The Chimes : Dickens's Tract for the Times', Dickens 1970, Chapman and Hall, 1970, p.114.
9. David Ricardo, Principles of Political Economy (1817), selections found in Voices of the Industrial Revolution, p.75.
10. T. B. Macaulay, 'Southey's Colloquies' (1830), reprinted in Macaulay's Essays, Longman Popular Edition, 1902, pp.119-121.
11. J. F. C. Harrison, The Early Victorians 1832-1851, Panther Books, 1971 and reprinted in 1973, p.113.
12. Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' (1829), Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, p.64.
13. J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer (1917), Longman New Edition, 1978, p.31.
14. Harrison, p.38.
15. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (1831), Chapman and Hall, 1872, p.114.
16. Harrison, p.85.
17. Hammond, pp.14-15.

18. Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1844), Panther Books, 1984. A reprint of the first English translation of 1885 with a useful introduction by Eric Hobsbawm. See the section entitled 'Single Branches of Industry. Factory Hands', pp.163-215.
19. J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer (1919), Longman New Edition, 1979, p.55.
20. Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism' (1839), reprinted in Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, p.162.
21. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (1843), edited with introduction by Richard Altick, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965, p.iv.
22. E. J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital 1848-1875, Abacus, 1977, p.21.
23. Robert Southey, Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society, Two Volumes, John Murray, 1829, Volume 1, p.170.
24. The social novelists offered their services to society in a variety of ways, as well as by writing novels. The diversity and energy of these writers was truly amazing. When Disraeli was not in the political limelight he took to writing. Mrs. Gaskell taught Sunday school classes while working with her husband's ministry and also took an active part in her children's education. Dickens and Kingsley were surely the most energetic. Dickens wrote fifteen novels and yet found time to be the editor of various journals and to be one of the leading philanthropists and speechmakers of the day. Kingsley on the other hand was preacher, poet, scientist, social reformer as well as novelist.
25. Charles Dickens, Bleak House (1853), Harmondsworth, 1971, p.683.
26. Mrs. Frances E. Kingsley (editor), Charles Kingsley His Letters and Memories of His Life, Two Volumes, Henry S. King and Co., 1877, Vol. 1, pp.183-184.
27. Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil (1845), Harmondsworth, 1980, p.96.
28. Arnold Kettle (editor), 'Poor Relations and Rich Publishers', The Open University Press, 1982, p.7.
29. The following books or essays have been of immense value in providing an introduction to the social and political novelists: Louis Cazamain, The Social and Political Novel 1830-1850 (1903), translated by Martin Fido, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973; Arnold Kettle, 'The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel', From Dickens to Hardy, edited by Boris Ford, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Volume 6, 1958; Sheila Smith, The Other Nation, Clarendon Press, 1980; Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, Clarendon Press, 1954; Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, Harmondsworth, 1958 and reprinted in 1980.

Chapter Two

Thomas Carlyle and the 'condition of England'

Social Prophet

Thomas Carlyle was one of the earliest and harshest critics of industrialism. His severe social criticism, in an age of unparalleled material prosperity, made him the leader of a small group of thinkers who thought that material wealth was eroding the bond between classes and rendering the ruling classes complacent. Fearing British society was heading for destruction, Carlyle thundered a message intended to wake the nation's soul.

Carlyle was surely one of the great minds of the age and was regarded by many as the nation's prophet. James Froude, his biographer, said Carlyle's teachings had saved him and others from the false creeds of the time.¹ His writings were so forceful he was likened to Homer, Wordsworth and Newman. This prophetic element was reinforced by the strong religious tone in his writings. His social criticism had an apocalyptic quality which not only described the current social problems but viewed these events as heavenly signs whose real meaning pointed to a larger malaise.

Carlyle's teachings exercised an extensive influence over many of the key minds of the day. J. S. Mill admitted he was not competent to judge Carlyle's writings.² John Ruskin openly called him 'My Master'.³ Carlyle's smoking sessions with many of the Victorian literary élite were famous, and enhanced his position as a major intellectual figure. Frequent visitors to his home in Chelsea included Dickens, Tennyson,

Browning and others who sought out his counsel. His influence, like many of his ideas, was dazzling. In 1846 a reviewer remarked: 'We know of many greater writers, in every sense, than Mr. Carlyle, but, perhaps, there is no living English author - if he can be properly be called so - who has a stronger and deeper hold on the minds of the English community.'⁴ Nor did this influence seem to wane. Nine years later the novelist George Eliot said:

'there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived.'⁵

Carlyle's influence then can hardly be overstated. So although Carlyle wrote extensively about society and politics, he left his greatest legacy not in society and politics but in the literary field. Carlyle's vivid response to industrialism influenced many writers and especially the social novelists because he helped them to interpret the contemporary situation.⁶ Each of the social novelists had encountered lower class poverty and unrest and feared social revolution. Disraeli received most of his information from the Commission Reports; Mrs. Gaskell knew the Mancunian poor because she worked with them; Kingsley never forgot the destruction he saw when he witnessed the Bristol riots; Dickens's social knowledge was a combination of personal experience, reading and observation. Carlyle urged these imaginative writers to think seriously and write about society by admonishing them to record 'what is true'.⁷ Carlyle's works were a catalyst to social writing because he had formulated the concepts of the 'two nations', the 'condition of England' question, and the 'cash-nexus'.

The extent to which Carlyle influenced these writers can be easily shown. Dickens, the most skilled writer of the group, said Carlyle was quite simply the man who 'knew everything' and personally boasted to Carlyle in a letter in 1854 that none knew his books better than he.⁸ Kingsley and Mrs. Gaskell looked to Carlyle as guide and critic. Kingsley was aided in securing publication of Alton Locke by a letter of recommendation from Carlyle to the publishers. Kingsley moreover quotes extensively from Carlyle in Yeast and in Alton Locke. Mrs. Gaskell learned from the Sage of Chelsea too. A passage from the essay 'Biography' stands on the title page of Mary Barton and her enlightened captains of industry surely have a Carlylean origin. Even Disraeli, whom Carlyle once called 'a cursed Jew, not worth his weight in cold bacon' would write about active aristocrats who had their inspiration in Past and Present.⁹

Among the reasons for Carlyle's popularity was the strong religious element to his social and political writings. Carlyle denounced mechanisation, materialism and Benthamism because he felt these were destroying man's dynamic and psychological self. By contrast Carlyle sought to revive a sense of the sacredness of life, and of the relations of men and women with each other and with society. Counter to a society which emphasised statistics, Carlyle wanted to re-establish man as the measure of all things. Life, Carlyle contended, was larger than any fact-laden theory, and he sought to put the divine spark back into history and nature.

Early Years

Thomas Carlyle was born on the 4th of December, 1795, in Ecclefechan, a small agricultural village in the Scottish Borders.

- The area, still sleepy today, must have been peaceful during Carlyle's youth and virtually untouched by the Industrial Revolution.
- Carlyle's description of the local Burgher Church could be applied to his total experience as a boy: 'Rude, rustic, bare, no Temple in the world was more so; but there were sacred lambencies, tongues of authentic flame from Heaven which kindled what was best in one, what has not yet gone out.'¹⁰

Thomas was from a large but closeknit family and the second of nine children. The close bond between his family became a source of strength and later the prototype for his social thinking. He was deeply influenced by his parents and although the family was materially poor, they were emotionally secure. James and Margaret Carlyle were members of a splinter sect of the Church of Scotland who were deeply religious. They stressed to their son the need for a strong religious faith buttressed by an esteem for hard work. Froude said Thomas's relationship with his mother was something like that of a pair of lovers and she was a kind woman towards whom he was ever devoted.¹¹ Of his father Thomas's praises knew no bounds. In the Reminiscences James Carlyle was described as 'a man of perhaps the very largest natural endowment of any it has been my lot to converse with' - high praise for one who split his vocational skills between farming and stone mason work.¹² 'Religion', said Carlyle, 'was the Pole-star for my Father, rude and uncultivated as he otherwise was, it made him and kept him "in all points a man".'¹³ Carlyle never forgot his father's strong moral example and frequent exhortation that man was not created to speculate idly or to dream but rather to work. While still young, the cardinal principles of Carlyle's social thinking were formed; faith, duty and work.

Carlyle began to doubt the validity of his parents' religious beliefs when he left home to attend Edinburgh University in 1809 at the impressionable age of thirteen. Although he was enrolled in the 'Arts' course, he was really preparing to fulfill his parents' ambition that he should enter the ministry. The experiences at Edinburgh brought religious uncertainty instead of instilling a deeper faith. The cold winds of rational arguments were overpowering and brought a blight over the uncultivated grounds for faith which he learned from his family in Dumfriesshire. At Edinburgh, Carlyle encountered a University entrenched in eighteenth-century rationalism. There Carlyle had to face the charges of the sceptical thinkers; David Hume, Adam Smith and John Locke, whose philosophies had reduced man to a position where he was a blank receiver of impressions who in truth could know little about himself and the world, and absolutely nothing beyond. What he met at Edinburgh conflicted with his earlier thinking and resulted in a religious crisis which lasted five years. The world he loved, shaped by his parents' influence, had crumbled. These years of intellectual wandering were a gruelling period and the extent of his inner torment was shown by the bouts of anxiety and nervous disorders which were to last all his life.

Dissatisfied with the intellectual climate in Edinburgh, Carlyle turned to Germany for solution to his metaphysical problems. He began studying German literature and philosophy enthusiastically, and his attention to German culture was so great he began corresponding with the spiritual master of Germany, Goethe, who helped guide him in his search for meaningful values.

Sartor Resartus

Sartor Resartus (1833) was the product of Carlyle's struggles to find certainty, and reflects his growing commitment to German Idealism. His first work had been a Life of Schiller (1823) and he had done much translation work. Sartor Resartus, a pivotal work, must be discussed further because here one can chart Carlyle's search for valid first principles as well as see his early diagnosis of industrialism.

Sartor Resartus is a difficult work to classify. The story revolves round a German philosopher, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and the cloaked account is really about Carlyle's loss and renewal of faith. In Sartor Resartus Carlyle describes how he conquered his doubts and regained his true sense of self. The key areas which describe Carlyle's renewal occur in the sections between 'the Everlasting No' and 'the Everlasting Yea'. There Carlyle explains how he courageously searched for meaning in a world distorted and blurred by doubt. Shorn of his parents' fundamentalism, he felt the world grow in hostility. Heaven and earth became impersonal, and he was overwhelmed by 'the darkness of life' and the 'threat of chaos'. The Universe became 'void of life, of Purpose, of Volition, ever of Hostility; it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam Engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb'.¹⁴

Carlyle resolves his doubts by sheer activity. Though the soul reaches the point of 'self annihilation' the immaterial part of man springs back with impressive resilience. The way out of the desert of unhappiness is action, which puts a man in touch with the world and ultimately with himself. Rather than be idle, a man must work through and absorb new experiences. Man must be driven by a sense of mission

and have faith in order to achieve any act of true significance. In this new state of mind Carlyle applied the ethic of hard work which he had learned from his father. The insight that man is a spiritual being and not just a mechanical creature would become a major tenet with which Carlyle and his disciples would later criticise industrial society.¹⁵ Man, Carlyle asserts, does have a soul. Man has 'a spirit, and divine Apparition. Round his mysterious ME, there lies, under all those wool rags, a Garment of flesh contextured in the Loom of Heaven.' Man is the 'Shekinah' glory of God, visible to the world in the hearts of other men. Man possesses other qualities besides the intellectual, and has a wide range of emotions. 'He feels; power has been given him to know, to believe; nay does not the spirit of Love, free in its celestial primeval brightness, even here, though but for moments, look through?' (p.44) Man therefore is obviously not a mechanical creature and has purpose in the world. The rebirth of self breeds a new sense of belonging in the world. With the overthrow of mechanisation comes a renewed perception of the soul of the world. Carlyle moves from a cosmos 'void of life' to a world which is fully integrated, a world of which the author feels himself a part once again: 'The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike and my Father's.' (p.130) Nature too is no longer viewed as fragmented but as a whole. The renewed self brings a feeling of the interconnection of all. Because the highest is related to the lowest, there is no room for isolation or, even worse, idleness. The only life now worth living is one which sees God's hand in the world, history and nature.¹⁶

Sartor Resartus is a pivotal work primarily because here Carlyle resolves his intellectual difficulties. The work is of further

importance because it shows Carlyle already discussing some of the key social issues of his age. Here for example the theme of the 'two nations' is already at the forefront of Carlyle's mind and one cannot read the following section without recalling Disraeli's more famous formulation in Sybil (1845) which appeared over ten years later. There are 'two Sects which at this moment, divide the more unsettled portion of the British People; and agitate that ever-vexed country. To the eye of the political Seer, their mutual relation, pregnant with the elements of discord and hostility, is far from consoling.' These divisions 'extend through the entire structure of Society, and work unwearily in the secret depths of the English national Existence; straining to separate and isolate it into two contradictory uncommunicating masses'. (p.197)

Sartor Resartus even contains a discussion about another major social development of the time; cities. Here the description of Weissnichtwo cites the strange synthesis of city life by pointing out how pollution and people co-exist together. The sense of surprise and disdain by the author that city dwellers must live this way will be a future catalyst and guide for the social novelists:

'Oh, under that hideous coverlet of vapours, and putrefactions, and unimaginable gases, what a Fermenting-vat lies simmering and hid! The joyful and the sorrowful are there; men are dying there, men are being born, men are praying, - on the other side of a brick partition, men are cursing; and around them all is the vast, void Night ... All these heaped and huddled together, with nothing but a little carpentry and masonry between them; - crammed in, like salted fish in their barrel; - or weltering, shall I say, like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed vipers, each struggling to get its head above the others : such work goes on under that smoke-counterpane!' (p.14)

To understand fully Carlyle's social criticism, it is necessary to examine three of his social essays. These essays are important because many of the ideas discussed there were taken up by the social novelists as they in turn came to question Benthamite accounts of the state.

Social Essays

'Signs of the Times' (1829) examined the growth and extent of mechanisation in Britain with particular emphasis on the human consequences. Carlyle had by now been thinking about industrialism for over a decade. His first encounters with industrialisation had occurred in 1817 when a walking tour of Scotland enabled him to see the extent of industry in Glasgow and to visit the Carron Ironworks factory and even Robert Owen's idealistic community at New Lanark. His visit to Birmingham and its factories in 1824 was a further introduction to industrialism.¹⁷ Now over ten years later Carlyle was beginning to realise many of its social and moral implications.

'Signs of the Times' is an essay about mechanisation and almost every paragraph in the work demonstrates that society is over-run with machines which dominate the external world and infringe upon man's inner life.¹⁸ Mechanisation, like an octopus, has spread its ugly, life-strangling tentacles everywhere:

'Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but above all others, the Mechanical Age.'¹⁹

Mechanisation has gone too far and pervaded every sphere of life.

Education, the sciences, the church, even intelligence and knowledge,

have embraced a mechanical aspect. The machine has temporarily blinded man with a false sense of power. Carlyle cites the changed role of heavy industry and claims that mechanisation, by its sheer power to move products and to create wealth, has altered the established framework of society. Mechanisation, Carlyle argues, destroys the minds of men by burying man's vital element under the hypnotic power of systems and machines. The problem with the age, Carlyle contends, is that man has lost faith in 'individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind' and instead of pursuing 'internal perfection' seeks 'external combinations and arrangements, of institutions, constitutions - for Mechanism of one sort of another'. (p.61)

This pessimistic line of thinking upset the general positive outlook of the period. The Whigs, led by their apostle Macaulay, were in no doubt that civilisation was advancing, and demonstrated their points by arguing that most countrymen were now better fed, clothed and housed. Similarly they argued that more people were kept alive and were living longer.²⁰ Carlyle, however, had different ideas about progress and felt other religious and moral factors had to be considered. Carlyle was more concerned with men living a good life rather than having a good life.

In 'Signs of the Times' Carlyle presents a definition of man which allows him a wider scope to discuss the effects of mechanism. Here Carlyle states there are two main aspects of man:

'To speak a little pedantically, there is a science of Dynamics in man's fortunes and nature, as well as of Mechanics. There is a science which treats of, and practically addresses, the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly

vital and infinite character; as well as a science which practically addressed the finite, modified developments of these, when they take the shape of immediate 'motives', as hope of reward, or as fear of 'punishment.' (p.72)

Carlyle's emphasis then falls on the creative or 'dynamic' side, and the quality of life which he praises here and in other places is a particular type of intelligence, an intelligence closely associated with a man's vision : the ability to distinguish the world of truth from the world of appearances.²¹ 'Signs of the Times' is an important starting point for Carlyle's social thinking because here he exposes how deeply mechanisation has penetrated every aspect of British life. Carlyle's portrayal of an increasingly mechanised world is the result of 'a deep struggle in the whole fabric of society', a boundless grinding collision between the old and new worlds. (p.84)

'Characteristics', published two years later in 1831, contains much of the same criticism as 'Signs of the Times' but here there is more emphasis on society. The new sense of social concentration grew from two factors which preceded composition. Firstly Saint-Simon's political works helped to broaden Carlyle's social thinking and forced comparison in his own mind between different periods in history. The other event was personally experienced. In 1831 Carlyle lived in London and gained first hand experience of the great poverty and suffering which existed during the Reform Bill crisis.

'Characteristics' introduces Carlyle's first ideas regarding man as a social animal. Society, Carlyle thinks, is a necessary aspect of one's humanity and is referred to as the 'genial element' in man. Carlyle's solitary man is stunted, isolated to himself, and without social life would be unaware of his 'spiritual activities'.

Coexistence with other humans breeds a combustionable creative force between men:

'Man has joined himself with man; soul acts and reacts on soul; a mystic miraculous unfathomable Union establishes itself; Life, in all its elements, has become intensated, consecrated.'²²

The 'lightning spark of thought' has a cumulative effect and results in the formation of all human expression and culture. (p.11)

'Chartism' (1839), written ten years after 'Signs of the Times', reveals Carlyle's deepening social awareness and growing concern with the state of the nation. The essay provides evidence of a shift in Carlyle's thinking and focus. There has been a movement away from the purely theoretical in order to address specific social problems. 'Chartism' marks the beginning of several important themes in Carlyle's social philosophy. The title of the essay is deceptive because it does not have much to do with Chartism. Instead the rumbling Chartist movement becomes the focus of a greater problem. The real source of hostility, Carlyle thinks, lies deeper. In digging beneath the surface Carlyle again finds the friction caused by the struggle previously mentioned in 'Signs of the Times'. Now the social malaise is wide-spread and England is viewed as morally, physically and spiritually extinct:

'Alas, in such times it grows to be the universal belief, sole accredited knowingness, and the contrary of it accounted puerile enthusiasm, this sorrowfullest disbelief that there is properly speaking any truth in the world; that the world was, has been or ever can be guided, except by simulation, dissimulation, and the sufficiently dextrous practice of pretence. The faith of men is dead : in what has guineas in its pocket, beef-eaters riding behind it, and cannons trundling before it, they can believe; in what has none of these things they cannot believe. Sense for the true and false is lost; there is properly no

longer any true or false. It is the heyday of Imposture; of Semblance recognising itself, and getting itself recognised, for Substance. Gaping multitudes listen; unlistening multitudes see not but that it is all right, and in the order of Nature. Earnest men, one of a million, shut their lips; suppressing thoughts, which there are no words to utter. To them it is too visible that spiritual life has departed; that material life, in whatsoever figure of it, cannot long remain behind.'²³

Human life as depicted here has had the living sparks extinguished by the conquest of materialism. The anti-life forces of the mill and factory have cast a black shadow over all 'dynamic' traits. A cash-nexus mentality dominates thinking. Supply and demand and profit and loss have become the laws in society which bind humans together. Workers are not treated as people any longer but as the commodities they make in the mills. The profit mentality has reduced all relationships to cash relationships and Carlyle believes no society erected on these inhuman terms can last for long.

'Chartism' is primarily a stinging condemnation of the ruling classes. The problem with England is that there is no real leadership, none who can provide the proper direction. Therefore England is described as on a dangerous course and likened to a ship headed towards the rocks with no captain. If nothing is done to amend the situation 'something will do itself one day, and in a fashion that will please nobody'. (p.151) Here Carlyle portrays the leadership of the country as being largely absentee, as being bent on wealth and pleasure. Instead of grasping the reins of national administration responsibly, the aristocracy are out on their estates shooting game. The general spirit of society is a cavalier one. A lazy spirit of laissez-faire has settled over the country. The general rule for social thinking

resembles the habit of the aristocrats who on their lavish estates call for as little social intervention and legislation as possible. Carlyle, recalling his father's words, parts from their inert company and blames the aristocracy for creating the present social unrest. The aristocracy have ceased to be active rulers and the toiling classes 'need to be guided and governed'. The leadership must change its comfortable posture and respond to the cries of the nation:

'Bellowings, inarticulate cries as of a dumb creature in rage and pain; to the ear of wisdom they are inarticulate prayers: 'Guide me, govern me! I am mad and miserable, and cannot guide myself!' ... Surely of all 'rights of men', this right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be, gently or forcibly held in the true cause by him, is the indisputablest ...' (p.189)

'Chartism' challenges the validity of the laissez-faire outlook, an outlook which is unnecessarily harsh because it makes no provision for the poor or to ameliorate suffering. Such selfishness, Carlyle contends, is only an extension of the cash-nexus mentality, and he condemns this myopic thinking because it raises material prosperity above the full blooded individual. Again Carlyle forcefully asserts that man has a soul and spirit and these factors must be considered in any economic system:

'And now what is thy property? That parchment title-deed, that purse thou buttonest in thy breeches-pocket? Is that thy valuable property? Unhappy brother, most poor insolvent brother, I without parchment at all, with purse oftenest in the flaccid state, imponderous, which will not fling against the wind, have quite other property than that! I have the miraculous breath of Life in me, breathed into my nostrils by Almighty God. I have affections, thoughts, a god-given capability to be and do; rights, therefore, - the right for instance to thy love if I love thee, to thy guidance if I obey thee : the strangest rights, whereof in church pulpits one still hears

something, though almost unintelligible now;
rights, stretching high into Immensity, far
into Eternity!' (p.194)

Carlyle offers the working man further hope besides good leadership. Two solutions are emigration and education. The former will utilise a vast idle workforce and the latter will help 'regulate' the minds of millions by providing 'partial light'. But more than anything else Carlyle desires a deeper class understanding by the ruling classes who as effective leaders will look compassionately towards the poor. The injustice of the times is shown by the aristocrats who profit financially from the enterprising social system and by a government clogged by impersonal national statistics which abstract the severity of the social problem. Carlyle attacks these injustices by saying the only way to empty the crammed workhouse and solve the growing unemployment is through effective and extensive use of labour. Work becomes one of man's central functions in Carlyle's message. Work is a man's religion and the effort by which he finds his place in the Universe. In the Carlylean gospel unemployment aids godlessness. That horses can find work and people cannot is only another sign that something is wrong with the nation. The worker fundamentally is well meaning and must be heard. His grumbling and collective struggles are cries for assistance as well as for a fair day's pay. Carlyle believes workers merely want to see themselves as useful parts in society and to attain 'a manlike place and relation'.

These social essays then follow the same pattern which was seen in Sartor Resartus. The essays have a dual purpose and reject 'mechanism' on the one hand and embrace the 'dynamic' view of man on the other. Carlyle then turns to apply these principles to history and as in the

earlier essays, the stress falls on man as a social being.

History and the Hero

We now move to Carlyle's view of history which set him apart from those who accepted the popular materialistic theories of Macaulay and Buckle. Carlyle's assertion that history is in essence the history of great individuals transcends the materialistic economic theories to give man control over his destiny.

Heroes and Hero Worship (1841) was a tribute to the hero in history. 'Universal history' we are told, 'is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here'.²⁴ Heroes alone are the souls who have guided the world, Carlyle states, and constitute the marrow of the world's history.

There is no mistaking Carlyle's belief that his message had full relevance for the age. This justifies the tremendous sense of urgency in the book, the type of urgency which comes when one is trying to save something from ruin. Carlyle is writing in defence of the imagination which he feels is being slowly swallowed up by mechanised society. Shortly after completing the work he wrote to J. S. Mill saying: 'Men have no time to think; they have only time to scheme and work.'²⁵ Carlyle was writing therefore against the spirit of mammon which has blighted the important dynamic imaginative abilities in man. There is, Carlyle thinks, a direct correlation between the rise of mechanisation and the decline of the heroic. To Carlyle it is the eleventh hour and Heroes and Hero Worship attempts to establish the importance of the heroic vision. Heroes and Hero Worship traces the development of a particular type of outlook, one which Carlyle feels is needed in his

own day. The work is a compilation of six lectures which were given in London in 1840; they were extremely popular and publication soon followed.

The hero is a protean figure who changes in form as history evolves. Heroes and Hero Worship traces such developments, beginning with the Scandanavian myth figure Odin who represents the hero as divinity or god. The epochs are progressive and the hero of one period cannot reappear in another. The hero takes six forms; divinity, poet, priest, prophet, man of letters and king. However, Carlyle's heroes have several qualities in common. They are first and foremost men of great vision, possessing the ability to see through the cant and empty symbols of the world and into the very essence of the Universe. As 'Heaven's Captains' they wage war against disbelief and the hero typically takes the form of a reformer or crusader.

Each hero follows a typical pattern, a pattern which is based on Carlyle's own experience. For this reason they appear as personal projections. Each hero undergoes a conversion similar to the one that forced Carlyle to formulate a new creed in the Sartor Resartus. Each individual hero ponders the mystery the Universe poses and is drawn into action after a relatively placid life. They face their historical situation with all of their being in an effort to make order in the surrounding chaos. Heroes have two important functions according to Carlyle. Firstly, they possess God's message, and secondly, the responsibility to apply the message and to establish a small paradise on earth. Because the hero brings heaven's message, he deserves to be the leader of society. The terms in which Carlyle talks about leadership remind one of the thane chiefs in Beowulf where the hero is a warrior

who protects his tribe from enemies. The Carlylean hero also does great things and is respected for it. So it is that Mohamed creates a religion, Luther engineers a Reformation and Cromwell leads a nation back to holiness. It is always a rule in Carlyle's writings that heroism is dependent on spiritual nature rather than divine right of heredity.

In Carlyle's opinion it is absolutely necessary that society recognise its heroes. Otherwise such a society will become sickly because it will then have cut itself off from the transmitters of all ideas, and suffer the curse of the eighteenth century, an age Carlyle called the era of hypocrisy and atheism. Carlyle attacked the previous century for the feebleness of its leadership. The nineteenth century, Carlyle thought, must avoid a similar fate.

Past and Present

Past and Present (1843) is the summation of Carlyle's social criticism and the place where all his social ideas merge. The main tenets of Carlyle's philosophy - the need for active heroes, the true nature of faith, and the championing of work - each receive major treatment in this essay.

Carlyle first conceived the idea for the book while planning a biography of Cromwell, a topic he had been researching for three years. While travelling to Suffolk to meet his wife Jane and to gather further material for the Cromwell project, Carlyle visited the abbey near Bury St. Edmunds and the workhouse of St. Ives. The vivid contrast between the two, the former idyllic and hallmarked as the age of faith, the latter filled with hungry paupers, pawns of the ruthless political

system, seized Carlyle's imagination. The general alarm regarding the condition of the nation shifted Carlyle's thoughts from historical research to social commentary. What originally began as a trip to gather material about Cromwell became the inspiration for one of the world's great books.

Past and Present was written with great emotional intensity. Carlyle was indignant at seeing the poor crammed into workhouses and incapable of contributing to the solution of the national malaise. Carlyle produced the volume in five months by working at a feverish pace. His concentration was so consuming he said 'a red hot element' was burning the life out of him.²⁶ A letter Carlyle wrote to his friend John Sterling showed his mind was troubled:

'This thing I am upon is a volume to be called 'Past and Present'; it is moral, political, historical, etc.; - a most questionable, redhot, indignant thing : for my heart is sick to look at the things now going on in England, and two millions of men sitting in Poor Law Bastilles seem to ask of every English soul, 'Hast thou no word to say for us?' On the whole, I am heartily sorry for myself, - sorry that I could not help writing such words, and had none better to write.'²⁷

The years prior to the composition of Past and Present were ones of economic and social distress. It must have seemed to Carlyle and others that the nation was collapsing. Foreign tariffs took away overseas markets which had been a chief source of profit. Poor harvests made the situation worse, especially in Ireland where hundreds of thousands died. Food was so scarce that people often ate the carcasses of dead animals. Furthermore the New Poor Law which came into force in 1834 was proving to be ineffective. The workhouse system was exhausted, hopelessly overcrowded. The St. Ives workhouse which so infuriated

Carlyle was representative of the greater national problem. Carlyle was angry that the government lacked the leadership to end suffering.

The sharp social criticism and contrasts which illuminated the ills of the time appealed to many minds. The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson called the 'new poem' a work of genius.²⁸ Even the German socialist Friedrich Engels had much in common with Carlyle's portrayal of the social condition and favourably reviewed Past and Present. Indeed Engels said in a review that Past and Present was the one critical social work of the times worth reading, 'the only one which touches upon human strings, which expounds upon human circumstances, which develops a sign of a human point of view'.²⁹

In Past and Present Carlyle provides his antidote to profit-crazed contemporaries by contrasting the social and spiritual values of the twelfth century with his own mechanised era. Past and Present offers a vision of an enlightened industrialism where God's priests are no longer clergy but benevolent industrialists who carry out God's work on earth. The vision of a working aristocracy, both landed and industrial, becomes a major element in his teaching which the social novelists borrowed.

The theme of Past and Present is built round dramatic comparisons in time. The contrasts are primarily employed to examine the different presuppositions by which each era operated as well as depicting the quality of life of its citizens. Past and Present begins by expanding the theme of social collapse discussed in Carlyle's earlier social essays. Here Carlyle shows a sense of urgency is needed by grouping several social events together under the 'condition of England' question. By doing so Carlyle made the rise of industrialism, the proliferation of

the cash-nexus mentality, the mammoth unemployment and the advance of Chartism, all seem like one event:

'The condition of England, on which many pamphlets are now in the course of publication, and many thoughts unpublished are going on in every reflective head, is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest, ever seen in this world.'³⁰

The opening sections describe how ineffective leadership has created economic and social disaster in Carlyle's own generation. Carlyle lists a series of examples in which he demonstrates how the ruling classes are content to count their money instead of being responsible leaders. The governing classes, being profit motivated, have helped fuel social calamity by resorting to expediency instead of getting at the root of the social malaise. Parliament, symbolised by powder and horsehair, is deaf to the cries of the people and at best can only propose temporary ad hoc solutions:

'Reform Bill proves to be a failure; Bentham's Radicalism, the gospel of 'Enlightened Selfishness', dies out, or dwindles into Five-point Chartism, amid the tears and hootings of men : what next are we to hope to try? Five-point Charter, Free-Trade, Church-extension, Sliding-scale, what, in Heaven's name, are we next to attempt, that we sink not in inane Chimera, and be devoured by Chaos?' (p.25)

Manufacturers rob their workers by offering low wages that cannot be refused and then insult them further by laying them off due to overproduction. The governing classes, Carlyle argues, must do better. They have created the unfair economic conditions by overproduction, and now to say 'Go home and find work' is wrong and irresponsible. The worker, trapped between an inefficient government and unprincipled employers, suffers. The spirit of the cash-nexus outlook rules the land and

people are motivated only by profit. 'Liberty' has been reduced to a marketplace commodity. The concept of heaven and hell has also gained financial dimensions. Everything, Carlyle contends, has been made less important than money and he mourns the passing of long standing social ties.

Carlyle provides a series of examples to establish how selfish such policies are, and how they result in unnecessary suffering for the working classes. He finds it cruelly ironic that great poverty can exist alongside lavish wealth. The national paradox is that England is 'full of wealth' and 'unabated bounty' and actually starving. Unemployment is so widespread that most workhouses and prisons are overcrowded. Conditions are so desperate for the working man that a couple poison their children to use the burial money to buy food. The insular policies of the government are bursting the seams of society and destroying the country. Carlyle assumes his prophetic stance to demonstrate the need for unity between classes and to plead for greater awareness of social ties. On the individual level he cites the tragic case of the Irish woman from Edinburgh who accidentally infected and killed seventeen others with typhus when refused assistance from a Charity House. Collective pleas for help are the compelling forces behind the rumblings of the Manchester Insurrection and all social movements. Such events Carlyle interprets as vital messages pointing the governing classes towards heroic leadership.

In comparing the 1840's with the twelfth century, Carlyle's arguments gather strength and momentum. Two ages, so far apart in time, ethos and custom, are brought together to speak in a powerful way.

Carlyle was acquainted with the mediaevalist sentiments of his countryman Cobbett, the Frenchman Saint-Simon and the Germans Goethe, Schlegel, Herder and Novalis. Of these three traditions the French one was the most important because through Saint-Simon's writings Carlyle came to view the mediaeval world as a single purposeful entity ruled by the Roman Catholic Church.³¹ What Carlyle emphasised in his praise of the twelfth century was above all else the quality of men's lives. Carlyle was noticeably enthusiastic about the past and like many Victorians thought the men of the Middle Ages were closer to nature because they were linked to the land and not the machine. Mediaeval man, many felt, was freer, happier and more creative than his Victorian counterpart.

The mediaeval world in Past and Present is shown to be different from the nineteenth century in two fundamental respects : one to do with leadership, the other to do with poverty. Carlyle shows clearly that those leading the St. Edmunds monastery were rulers who were worthy of their office and this is why so much of the narrative deals with Samson's election as abbot. Moreover Carlyle points out how the poor, so neglected in his own time, were then cared for by their betters. Carlyle cites the mediaeval thrall Gurth whose slavery gave him more security than most nineteenth century factory workers:

'... Gurth, with the sky above him, with the free air and tinted bosage and umbrage round him, and in him at least the certainty of supper and social lodging when he came home; Gurth to me seems happy in comparison with many a Lancashire and Buckinghamshire man of these days, not born thrall of anybody! Gurth's brass collar did not gall him : Cedric deserved to be his master. The pig's were Cedric's, but Gurth too would get his parings of them. Gurth had the inexpressible satisfaction of feeling himself related indissolubly, though in a rude brass-collar way, to

his fellow-mortals in this Earth. He had superiors, inferiors, equals.' (p.182)

In a series of sketches Carlyle establishes the greatness of mediaeval man. Jocelin the biographer, a lesser Boswell, provides information about the life at Bury St. Edmunds. He is an intelligent monk, wise in biblical and classical literature. He is a truthful, open-hearted man whom the Lord Abbot makes chaplain.³² Jocelin's discussion on the abbey's history takes the reader on a tour of mediaeval heroes.

The literary cameos begin with Edmund whose life is marked by fidelity and self-sacrifice. Like all of Carlyle's spiritual élite, Edmund is a man of action and like one of the Old Testament saints walks with God. Carlyle makes two points concerning Edmund's battle with the Danes. The earthly confrontation between the religious man and the heathen is actually a battle between the choices of God and Mammon. Edmund dies a martyr's death when he denounces the Danes' pagan ways and although Edmund is killed, his good works and life of faith live on as an example to others. A chapel is built round the place where he dies and the shrine becomes a monastery after Edmund is proclaimed a saint. Carlyle says history remembers goods deeds.

Carlyle singles out Abbot Hugo and a young monk named Samson as worthy of particular notice. Carlyle draws an important lesson between heroic and irresponsible leadership. Under Abbot Hugo, the monastery is in a shambles. Hugo, in stark contrast to Edmund, lacks personal wisdom and social insight. His religion is an inactive 'diseased self-introspection'. Hugo furthermore lacks insight on how to run the monastery properly. He is unknowingly a weak man who deceives himself.

Rather than assume his responsibility and thereby be worthy of his post, Hugo relies on the judgement of deceitful men and the abbey falls into disrepute and ruin. Debts mount and the monks begin to murmur dissent. Hugo's accidental death when horse-riding reinforces the fact he has no control over man or beast.

Brother Samson is the greatest contrast to the sham figures who propose only temporary solutions. Unlike his predecessor, Samson assumes responsibility and considers it his calling to direct his monastic brothers. Samson displays the active type of leadership which Carlyle would like the industrialists of his own age to copy. Samson's leadership brings an efficient well run monastery where men are motivated by religion and hard work. Thus the abbey becomes a model for industrialised Britain.

The focal point of Samson's life is religion. His name recalls the strength of Samson from the Old Testament. His youth reminds us of another biblical character, Moses. His birth and upbringing include visions and dreams. Samson is left to live in a monastery by a frightened mother and soon joins the order. He is a man marked by God's hand and is intelligent and creative. He possesses more than intelligence though, and is also a compassionate man who understands other men's motives. These unique abilities propel him to a position of leadership in the abbey.

The true Carlylean hero, Samson creates order from chaos. All his words have sense in them. After Hugo's death the other monks elect Samson abbot. Carlyle's point is well taken; in an age free from nineteenth-century political procedures, true leaders were recognised and found their natural level. Such figures, Carlyle argues, have a

divine right to rule other men.

Carlyle then shows how the new abbot brings stability back to the monastery. Samson hates whatever is 'incoherent, pusillanimous, unvarnished, - that is to say, chaotic, ungoverned, of the Devil, not of god'. (p.76) Samson shows no 'extraordinary favour' because he wants fit men in his abbey. Liars, drunks and the disorderly ones are excommunicated. Samson acts swiftly but never rashly. Like any righteous judge, he enforces justice but never goes beyond the proper limits. He is a compassionate man and bursts into tears after belligerent monks ask for a reduction in their punishment. A mindful and active man, Samson applies himself to the task of rebuilding churches, dwellings and of course, Edmund's shrine. He is however not totally self-dependent. He remains a loyal subject of Richard Coeur de Lion for whom he takes up arms while the king is away in France. All of this Carlyle finds massively impressive and yearns for its equivalent among his contemporaries. The diligent, faithful community of Bury St. Edmunds becomes a perfect model for Britain in the 1840's. The evils of industrialism can be eliminated, Carlyle insists, if the ruling classes are instilled with a new set of ethics and the workers given a new vision. Carlyle pleads for a working aristocracy which is socially and morally responsible, such as the Duke of Weimar who not only administered his Dukedom but also built helpful institutions. The Captains of Industry, infused with a new spirit of chivalry, must lead the crusade against poverty and unemployment.

The great lesson of St. Edmunds is 'Laborare est Orare'. Past and Present is a celebration of work which claims that work is the force and fibre of a man's life. All social and material barriers, Carlyle

optimistically states, can be overcome by hard work. Work, in Carlyle's estimation, enables a man to assume a god-like role; he tills the ground and in making order from chaos reaps a rich harvest and thereby perfects the world. Work forges a bond of permanence among men and unites those who sweat from their limbs with those who sweat with their mind. By working the soil or using his hands, man cultivates his inner life, realising his potential and limitations. Even mechanical work is beneficial as long as the worker has a sense of mission.³³ Work therefore is everything according to Carlyle : man's mission, religion, destiny, his only lasting activity, his liberty, his all. Carlyle celebrates a world which is inhabited by men whose religion is labour:

'Wheresoever thou findest Disorder, there is thy eternal enemy; attack him swiftly, subdue him; make Order of him, the subject not of Chaos, but of Intelligence, Divinity and Thee! The thistle that grows in thy path, dig it out, that a blade of useful grass, a drop of nourishing milk, may grow there instead. The waste cotton-shrub, gather its waste white down, spin it, weave it; that, in place of idle litter, there may be folded webs, and the naked skin of man be covered.'
(pp.172-173)

Carlyle's social message may therefore be summed up in the following way. Arguing the need for a sense of moral responsibility, Carlyle calls for a unification between the cultured aristocrat and worldly wise manufacturer. Together, with both spiritual and practical wisdom, they can resemble the heroic figures of the past by both listening to and leading the working classes. On a deeper level Carlyle's social message and his criticism of industrialism, results from his particular emphasis on man's dynamic side, the source of man's originality and creativity. In one of the most vehement rejections of the encroachments of the machine in the nineteenth century, Carlyle loudly

proclaims that man is a sentient being and not a soulless machine. Moreover these special capacities are to be actively used because it is only through work that man can improve his inner life and transform his outer world. Carlyle tries to bring social harmony to a divided Britain by showing that its profound social problems can be solved if only enough human effort and energy are applied more effectively.

Later Years

The years following the decade of celebrity of the 1840's marked a change in Carlyle's message and his role of social prophet was not to last. Carlyle's later message lost the sense of immediacy when the economy improved in the 1850's. The 'age of equipose' was more prosperous and less unstable and the new sense of optimism was best symbolised by the Great Exhibition of 1851. This period saw the emergence of a dark, pessimistic Carlyle, a second Sage of Chelsea who had begun to outlive the presuppositions of his own time.³⁴ Carlyle began to adopt a radical despotic viewpoint which alienated him both from the reading public and many of his personal friends. The poet Arthur Clough pinpointed the widening rift between Carlyle and his disciples when he said: 'Carlyle has led us out into the desert - and left us there.'³⁵

The adoption of an extremist position may have been the result of personal frustration. The long cherished hopes for a position in government never materialised and these disappointments may have been magnified by his low opinion of those who were in power.³⁶ Increasingly he felt more radical measures had to be adopted whereby suitable heroic

figures would be given full control of the country.

'The Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question', (1849) and Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850) were scathing social statements which caused an uproar among readers because of their extreme political measures. 'Occasional Discourse' was highly offensive and unpopular because of its harsh authoritarian position regarding the West Indians. The pamphlet took the radical position of the 'beneficent whip' and affirmed that slavery was for the West Indians's own good. Worse than that was the strong racist element: 'Our beautiful Black darlings are at last happy; with little labour except to the teeth, which surely, in those excellent horse-jaws of theirs, will not fail.'³⁷ In Latter-Day Pamphlets Carlyle assumed a tyrannical position attacking democracy, philanthropy and the lax legal system. In 'Downing Street' democracy was likened despairingly to mob-rule. The Foreign Office and its policies would be better off burnt to the ground because it was filled with 'blind obstructions, fatal indolences, pedantries, stupidities'. It was only men like Cromwell and Frederick the Great who could arrest chaos and Carlyle accordingly dedicated his later years to researching their lives and letters. Frustrated and alienated at the way society was heading, brute force seemed to Carlyle to be the only way to stop the spread of materialism and lawlessness. The young visionary had become the angry prophet.³⁸

Conclusion

To dwell on Carlyle's later years alone would misrepresent one of the greatest Victorian social critics. Carlyle's pertinent social analysis and championing of traditional values helped ease the crumbling social-religious picture. In an age of unparalleled change, the

cry 'work and despair not' was like an oasis in the desert because this gave his readers hope in the midst of rapid transition. Carlyle's stress on history and the changing fabric of society inspired many of the best minds of the day and in particular a group of novelists who were chiefly concerned with industrialism and the 'condition of England' question. These novels, their beliefs, motives and influences, are examined in some detail in this survey.

Footnotes to Chapter Two

1. James Anthony Froude, Froude's Life of Carlyle (1882-84), edited by John Clubbe, John Murray, 1979, pp.421-423. The passage is worth quoting in full:

'I, for one, was saved by Carlyle's writings from Positivism, or Romanism, or Atheism, or any other of the creeds or no creeds which in those years were whirling us about in Oxford like leaves in an autumn storm. The controversies of the place had unsettled the faith which we had inherited. The alternatives were being thrust upon us of believing nothing, or believing everything which superstition, disguised as Church authority, had been pleased to improve; or, as a third course, and a worse one, of acquiescing, for worldly convenience, in the established order of things, which had been made intellectually incredible. Carlyle taught me a creed which I could then accept as really true, which I have held ever since, with increasing confidence, as the interpretation of my existence and the guide of my conduct, so far as I have been able to act up to it.'

2. John Stuart Mill, Autobiography (1873), edited by Jack Stillinger, Oxford University Press, 1971, p.106. Mill's praise of Carlyle is also worth citing:

'I did not, however, deem myself a competent judge of Carlyle. I felt that he was a poet, and that I was not; that he was a man of intuition, which I was not; and that as such, he not only saw many things long before me, which I could only, when they were pointed out to me, hobble after and prove, but that it was highly probable he could see many things which were not visible to me even after they were pointed out.'

3. Holbrook Jackson, The Rise and Fall in 19th Century Idealism, The Citadel Press, 1969, p.25.
4. Jules Paul Seigel (editor), Thomas Carlyle : The Critical Heritage, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p.3.
5. Ian Campbell, Thomas Carlyle, Writers and Their Work, 262, Longman, 1978, p.5.
6. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society : 1780-1950, pp.85-86. Williams gives the best explanation as to Carlyle's immense influence when talking about 'Signs of the Times':

'Carlyle is in this essay stating a direct response to the England of his times : to Industrialism, which he was the first to name : to the feel, the quality, of men's general reactions - that structure of contemporary feeling which is only ever apprehended directly; as well as to the character and conflict of formal systems and points of view.'

7. Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p.155.
8. For an excellent discussion of Carlyle's and Dickens's relationship see Michael Goldberg, Carlyle and Dickens, University of Georgia Press, 1972. See 'Encounter', pp.1-19.
9. Christopher Hibbert, Disraeli and his world, Thames and Hudson, 1978, p.110.
10. Richard Ormond and John Cooper, 'Thomas Carlyle 1795-1881', National Portrait Gallery, 1981, p.3.
11. A. Ralli, Guide to Carlyle, Two Volumes, George and Unwin Ltd., 1920, Volume 1, p.14.
12. Thomas Carlyle, Reminiscences (1881), edited by Charles Eliot Norton, J. M. Dent and Son, 1972, p.3.
13. Reminiscences, p.10.
14. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (1833-34), Chapman and Hall, 1872, p.115. All references to this edition.
15. On this point Carlyle is emphatic in Sartor Resartus. His own testimony from Book II Chapter VII states: 'It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New birth, or Baphometric fire - Baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man.', p.117.
16. A good example as to how Carlyle saw the world can be seen in a passage from The French Revolution (1837), Three Volumes, Chapman and Hall, 1872, Volume II, Book Third, Chapter One, p.86:

'The thing that lies isolated inactive thou shalt nowhere discover; seek everywhere, from the granite mountain, slow-mouldering since Creation, to the passing cloud vapour, to the living man; to the action, to the spoken word of man.'

17. Froude said Carlyle's trip to Birmingham was like the opening of 'some fresh new volume of human life'. Froude's Life of Carlyle, edited by John Clubbe, p.158. Carlyle was amazed by what he encountered and wrote his brother Alexander a fascinating account:

'I was one day through the iron and coal works of this neighbourhood - a half-frightful scene! A space perhaps 30 square miles to the north of us,

covered over with furnaces, rolling mills, steam engines and sooty men. A dense cloud of pestilential smoke hangs over it forever, blackening even the grain that grows upon it; and at night the whole region burns like a volcano spitting fire from a thousand tubes of brick. But oh the wretched hundred and fifty thousand mortals that grind out their destiny there!' (p.657)

More importantly Carlyle was stunned by the wretched working conditions and took particular note of how these factors were affecting the labourers. He continues:

'In the coal mines they were literally naked, many of them, all but trowsers; black as ravens; plashing about among dripping caverns, or scrambling amid heaps of broken mineral; and thirsting unquenchably for beer. In the iron mills it was little better : blast furnaces ever roaring like the voice of many whirlwinds all round; the fiery metal was hissing thro' its moulds, or sparkling and spitting under hammers of a monstrous size, which fell like so many little earthquakes.' (p.657)

18. Herbert Sussman, Victorians and the Machine, Harvard University Press, 1968, p.22.
19. Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' (1829), found in Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, edited by Alan Shelston, Harmondsworth, 1980, p.64. All references to this edition.
20. T. B. Macaulay, History of England, I (1849), selections found in The Victorian Sages, edited by Alan W. Bellringer and C. B. Jones, Dent, 1975, p.46. Macaulay was one of the leading prophets of progress as the following passage illustrates:

'The term of human life has been lengthened over the whole kingdom, and especially in the towns ... the more we study the annals of the past, the more shall be rejoice that we live in a merciful age ... Every class doubtless has gained by this great moral change.'
21. Such 'vision' was later shown in Life of John Sterling (1851). Here Carlyle described the life and death of a friend who underwent a similar crisis of faith. Carlyle's portrayal stressed Sterling's dynamic qualities, his honesty in facing his religious doubt, his love for truth and personal courage in facing an incurable disease.
22. Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics' (1831), in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Volume III, Chapman and Hall, Centenary Edition, 1899, p.11. All references to this edition.
23. Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism' (1839), found in Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, p.183.

24. Thomas Carlyle, Heroes and Hero-Worship (1840), Chapman and Hall, 1872, p.1.
25. Alexander Carlyle (editor), Letters of Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, John Sterling and Robert Browning, T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1924, p.177.
26. Grace Calder, The Writing of Past and Present, Yale University Press, 1949, p.10.
27. Calder, p.10.
28. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Dial' (1843), found in Thomas Carlyle : The Critical Heritage, p.219.
29. Stephen Marcus, Engles, Manchester and the Working Class, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974, p.105.
30. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (1843), Chapman and Hall, 1872, p.1. All references to this edition.
31. The subject of mediaevalism and the nineteenth century is discussed by Alice Chandler in A Dream of Order, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971. See Chapter Four 'Faith and Order : Carlyle'.
32. See William Buckler's 'Past and Present as Literary Experience : An Essay in the Epistemological Imagination', Prose Studies 1800-1900, Volumes 1-2, 1978.
33. Sussman, p.31.
34. For further discussion of the 'two Carlyles' theory see David Gascoyne's Thomas Carlyle, Writers and Their Work, 23, Longman, 1952.
35. A.L. Le Quesne, Carlyle, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.82.
36. Frederick Kaplan, Thomas Carlyle, Cambridge University Press, 1983. See Chapter Eleven 'Revolutions', pp.270-298.
37. Le Quesne, pp.78-79.
38. Tillotson, p 152. Kathleen Tillotson makes the interesting point that despite Carlyle's radicalism he still continued to attract readers anxious to learn what intellectual errors to avoid.

Chapter Three

Benjamin Disraeli and Young England

The first author to be studied in this survey had the most elevated position from which to observe the social problems of the country. Benjamin Disraeli was one of the greatest political figures of his day and for many years was the chief spokesman of the Conservative party. As an MP, as the leader of the Young England movement and finally as Prime Minister he was at the forefront of the government's efforts to understand and ease social unrest.

Life and Political Thought

Benjamin Disraeli was born near Gray's Inn on 21st December, 1804 and was the second of five children. His background through his parents was Jewish and Italian, and these antecedents remained important to him all his life. His father Isaac was ambitious for his family and had his children baptized into the Church of England. More importantly Isaac was a respected man of letters whose love for literature was transferred to Benjamin. D'Israeli's anthology of anecdotes Curiosities of Literature (1791) gave him a wide audience including the romantic writers Byron and Scott and these literary acquaintances left an indelible mark upon the young boy's mind. Disraeli lacked the educational advantages of his future political rival William Gladstone, since his formal education was limited to Higham Hall and Blackheath; his most significant training came from the year he spent reading in his father's library. His first ventures into the world were disastrous, marked by a series of vocational and financial failures. When nearly seventeen he became a registered clerk in a legal firm in Frederick's Place.

Dissatisfied with the law he was drawn to the Stock Market where a series of foolish investments led him to debts which took years to pay back. He then attempted to found a daily newspaper The Representative which made him further indebted. His entrance into the world of society was also inauspicious. Many dismissed him from serious consideration when they saw his extravagant taste in clothing or heard his flamboyant conversation. His conspicuous manner was less offensive to women and he had several affairs. Eventually Disraeli found the perfect prize and married the rich widow, Mary Anne Lewis. The marriage was made for money but soon blossomed into a romance. Mrs. Lewis was fond of saying: 'Dizzy married me for my money, but if he had the chance again he would marry me for love.'¹

Disraeli first entered politics at the age of twenty-eight as a Radical candidate at High Wycombe in 1832. After three successive defeats he became a Conservative because he realised that in order to stand a real chance of holding office, he would have to join one of the major political parties. When he was finally elected MP for Maidstone in 1837 it marked the beginning of his rise to the 'top of the greasy pole'. His rise to political prominence, like Dickens's ascendancy in the literary world, provides a fine example of the fluidity of the Victorian social structure. Disraeli was weaned in Parliament and his political career had many successful moments. He was Chancellor of the Exchequer in several governments but his parliamentary skills were finally realised when he cleverly outmanoeuvred the Whigs in the Reform Bill of 1867 as the leader of the opposition. The ability to steal the thunder from his rivals was demonstrated again when Disraeli invested in the Suez Canal in 1875. He was Prime Minister twice; once briefly for ten months in 1868, and then again from 1874 to 1880. Victory came

late for him, but after years of faithful service he was created Earl of Beaconsfield in 1876. When he left political life in 1880 he was seventy-six years old; he died the following year.

In order to appreciate Disraeli's political novels one must first understand the soil from which they grew. Disraeli was part of the Romantic movement in politics which took place both in Germany and England and sought social regeneration among all classes. As early as 1835 Disraeli demonstrated the need for a revival in the ancient institutions of the country in his 'The Vindication of the English Constitution'. This was an important pamphlet because it outlined many of the principles which were to govern his later work.

Disraeli's political novels were tied to his involvement with the Young England movement, a political grouping built round the landed gentry which aimed at restoring the feudal ties between classes. The Young Englanders were part of a larger idealistic response to industrialism and classical economics in Britain and their efforts to rekindle mediaeval ideals could be seen elsewhere. At Oxford John Henry Newman's theology was moving ever closer to Rome. The architect Pugin designed buildings which looked back to the picturesque past. Perhaps the greatest indication of mediaeval fervour was the organisation of a tournament at Eglinton in 1839 at which key members of the English nobility were invited to celebrate in mediaeval costume. It was therefore appropriate that the Young Englanders were a group distinguished by both their feudal ideas and their white suits.

Enamoured of mediaeval times, the Young Englanders wanted to return to the social order which existed before the 1688 and Industrial Revolutions. They felt a return to a society governed by a noble aristocracy

influenced the philosophy of John Sterling and F. D. Maurice, two of the intellectuals who greatly influenced the lives of Carlyle and Kingsley. This volume encouraged an active and responsible aristocracy, appealing for a return of the spirit of noblesse oblige. Digby's insistence upon the responsibilities of wealth anticipates Carlyle's concept of hero-worship:

'Chivalry is only a name for that general spirit or state of mind which disposes men to heroic and generous actions, and keeps them conversant with all that is beautiful and sublime in the intellectual and moral world.'⁶

Not everyone shared the group's enthusiasms. Many thought the Young Englanders looked backward to an England that never did exist and forward to one that never could. With characteristic scorn Carlyle described the Young Englanders as clinging to a dead creed.⁷ In a similar vein Marx and Engels diagnosed Young England as 'half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future' in the 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1848).⁸

Disraeli the Novelist

Disraeli felt compelled to write novels and throughout his life he took to writing when not embroiled in politics. The sheer act of writing became the means by which the young aspirant could 'explain himself to himself'.⁹ He once said in a letter: 'My books are the history of my life ... I don't mean a vulgar photograph of incidents, but the psychological development of my character.'¹⁰ His life bore out the statement. He completed his first novel Vivian Grey in 1825 at the age of twenty-one and over half of a century later died at work on his tenth novel, Falconet, in 1881.

The common denominator in Disraeli's fiction is that his novels revolve round the world of the aristocracy. Disraeli described the aristocratic milieu perhaps more effectively than any Victorian novelist. For the most part his novels have been classified as those belonging to the 'silver-fork' school. The heroes of every novel are sleek aristocrats, each 'monstrous clever young men'.¹¹ Similarly the scenes in the novels gaily cascade between country estates, drawing rooms and chapels. In this respect Disraeli's novels of the beau monde contrast sharply with Dickens's works which describe the daily routines of London life. It was this lavish atmosphere which Anthony Trollope rejected as artificial when he said in his Autobiography (1883) that the world of Disraeli's novels was 'the glory of paste-board' and 'the wealth of tinsel'.¹²

This study is restricted to those novels which have been termed his political trilogy. Disraeli invented the political novel, that is the novel of party politics, to spread his political ideas and personal aspirations. Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred will be examined in sequence because they were originally planned as a group. Disraeli wrote in the 1870 Preface to his collected works that he had written the trilogy for the purpose of examining the 'derivation and character' of politics, the 'condition of the people', and 'the duties of the Church as a main remedial agency'. The majority of the discussion will be confined to Coningsby and Sybil because these novels were primarily concerned with the political and social situation of the country.

Coningsby

In the novel Coningsby (1844) Disraeli criticised the leadership of the Conservative party. The novel was written in his hour of political

disappointment as he was left out of Peel's cabinet in 1841. He intentionally set the background of the novel before the passage of the First Reform Bill in 1832 to show that the Conservative party had abandoned the true Tory cause. Disraeli wanted to establish that the Young England ideas were the very ones necessary for the safety of Britain and here he believed he was voicing the 'better mind of England'.

Carlyle's social writings declare that national calamity demands a new type of leadership and Coningsby is evidence that Disraeli agreed with this social analysis, for Coningsby, like Past and Present, compares the old and new ruling classes. There is a major distinction however between their heroes : Disraeli's male characters have the same valour as Carlyle's heroes but this is the result of ancient lineage rather than intellectual superiority.

The novel is built round Henry Coningsby, who through a series of events is forced to reject the unquestioning political views of his class and to adopt new political ideas. One of the major lessons of the novel is that the figures of the older generation offer no hope for the political and social dangers of the day. The leading figures of the ruling aristocracy are Lord Monmouth, Coningsby's rich grandfather, and Mr. Rigby, Monmouth's personal secretary. Monmouth is the personification of the old style aristocrat who is more concerned with the pursuit of pleasure than with governing the people. He is in every sense of the term, an absentee aristocrat. Although he has been an MP, and a leading Tory, he spends most of his time at his lavish estates abroad. He lives an Epicurean life and wants nothing else but to 'swim unmolested' in pleasure. The sad truth however is that he is incapable of attaining happiness and consequently he bolsters his life with endless

parties and frequent marriages. Perhaps worst of all, Monmouth is content to remain oblivious to most political problems and shuns all social responsibility. He is concerned only with his own interests and the sole occasion which brings him back to England is the threat of the passage of the Reform Bill which he hates. Lord Monmouth is so utterly ruthless in ensuring the safety of his property that he treats people as mere instruments to achieve his own ends. In the past he has interfered in the marriages of his sons, resulting in the death of one and the alienation of the other. The adoption of Coningsby lacks true benevolence because this results in the child's separation from his true mother and is done for the sake of future manipulation.

The confrontation between the opinionated Monmouth and the impressionable Coningsby provides the key commentary in the novel and highlights the differences between old and new aristocracies. This contrast becomes evident when Coningsby meets his grandfather for the first time. Coningsby's first impression reinforces the foreign aspect of his grandfather. Like one of Dickens's attentive youths, Coningsby notices the huge Palladian palace, the foreign guard and accents, the carnal French paintings and adornments. Coningsby is affected much as Pip is in Great Expectations when he first visits Satis House and is immediately seduced by the outward symbols of wealth which he must learn are empty. Coningsby too is overwhelmed by his grandfather's wealth and frigid ceremonialism and these early perceptions are true indications of his grandfather's character.

Many of the other aristocrats are also Epicureans. Disraeli deliberately contrasts an aristocracy solely devoted to pleasure with one which accepts the challenge of political leadership. Rigby,

Monmouth's right hand man, is a good example of a dull aristocrat who has many failings. He is first of all an aspirant who will do anything to sustain his high social position. He is obsessed with possessing 'the complete art of society' and gives parties with the intent of appearing better than others instead of making others happy. Similarly Rigby feels it his prerogative to determine who can climb on to the social ladder on Monmouth's estate.

In Rigby one sees how unenlightened the aristocracy has become, mistaking appearances for reality. As Coningsby's tutor, Rigby tells him that the religious faith of the nation could be increased simply by building more churches. Similarly Rigby thinks there would be an increase in patriotism if only the king would make more public appearances. Disraeli criticises Rigby as severely as Dickens does Gradgrind. They are both men who pride themselves in being educated. Rigby's classical study serves the same purpose as Gradgrind's observatory, and he solves the world's problems with the vindictive articles he writes but nobody ever reads. In Rigby Disraeli further shows what can happen to the person who becomes entangled in selfishness. Blind devotion to his employer has left Rigby callous and his moral, intellectual and imaginative qualities have been blunted in his reckless pursuit of rank.

Monmouth's other intimates, Lord Eskdale and Mr. Ormsby, are land-owners who envy Monmouth's wealth and never miss a chance to be seen with him in public. Ormsby has pathetically restricted his world to financial categories and divides humanity into those he can either control or humiliate. By contrast Eskdale has failed to make the most of his abilities and passes his time in entertainment. The epitome of the old generation are the social tapeworms Tadpole, Taper and Lord Fitzbooby who seek their livelihoods from the existing political system, content with it because

they benefit from it. As Tadpole says: 'All we have to do is get into Parliament, work well together, and keep other men down,' (p.129). Nor are the women of high society much better. Monmouth's wife Lucretia is a good example. The Monmouths' marriage, like the Dombey's from Dickens's Dombey and Son, lacks genuine love. Lucretia like the rest of the group wants solely to improve her social position.

The older generation ignores its own inner conscience and fails to recognise its own falseness. Its members lack both social sympathy and deep personal commitment. Life for these individuals is a round of meaningless events, one no different from the other. 'The comedy was over, the curtain fell, the audience, much amused, chattered brilliant criticism, and quitted the theatre to repair to the saloon, where they were to be diverted to-night with Russian dances.'¹³ With passages like this one wonders if Disraeli had in mind sections of the indolent aristocracy Carlyle presents in The French Revolution. Disraeli exposes the demerits of the ruling aristocracy in order to present the ideas of Young England. More is required of the aristocracy, Disraeli feels, than endless parties. The hope for the future of England lies in the development of a new type of active aristocracy with ideals and above all vision. In the life and growth of Coningsby Disraeli presents his solution to a stagnant political world.

Coningsby's growth into a political leader is slow and he must shed the class prejudices and ignorance he inherits from his family. Disraeli gives an idealised picture of Eton but makes the point that the idyllic playing fields are far away from the nerve-centre of the political crisis. At Eton Coningsby unthinkingly accepts the attitudes of privilege. This is clearly shown in the exclusion of Oswald Millbank simply because he is a manufacturer's son. Here Coningsby

shows he possesses the same ignorance of class Margaret Hale has in Mrs. Gaskell's North and South where Margaret falsely believes that all manufacturers conform to one stereotype. Coningsby's snobbery begins to change only when he saves Millbank from drowning. The struggle of the two boys in the water marks the turning point in their relationship. The episode serves as a symbol to show that the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie must cling to one another for both to survive.

Political feelings are stirred by contact with other Etonians and the enthusiasm and sheer honesty of these boys is a contrast to the stolid, manipulating world of the social élite. Political discussions are popular among the boys and Coningsby has the opportunity for further intellectual development. In particular he comes to recognise the stupidity of the deadlock which exists in the nation, and closer to home, the feud between his family and Millbank's. Lord Monmouth hates the Millbank family simply because they are his chief rivals for power. Millbank's enmity originates further back and takes the form of revenge. He seeks to curb Monmouth's stranglehold over the country because years earlier the rich Monmouth stole the heart of the woman he loved.

At Beaumanoir, the home of Henry Sydney, Coningsby finds new values and meets several people who are trying to revive the traditions of mediaeval society. Henry Sydney for example rejects the spiritual and material advances brought about by the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution and regards the ancient social structure as the only valid social pattern to be followed. He rejects the values of contemporary society because the modern way of thinking has destroyed many useful traditions. These were the views of Lord John Manners who was paraphrasing sections from Digby's The Broad Stone of Honour. This work

purports to show the advantages for those who follow the code of chivalry:

'... they serve their country by adorning its peculiar traditions and recollections; preserving alive in the memories of men the magnanimity and greatness of ages that are departed, and cherishing that poetry which lives in every people, until it is stifled by the various and factitious interests of a life devoted to luxury and avarice.'¹⁴

Eustace Lyle is another mediaevalist and he like Sydney represents the spiritual dimension of aristocratic leadership, a key element within the new generation which is lacking in the old. Lyle is one of Disraeli's most unusual literary creations. He superintends the village of St. Geneviève, a community where he restores many beneficial mediaeval traditions. Life is quite different in St. Geneviève, a place untouched by the dark factories of the Industrial Revolution. The old poor laws are still in force and shown to be more effective than the new poor laws. Residents freely give money and food to those out of work. The communal habits and close social bonds make the town a model for Britain.

Coningsby's attendance at Cambridge marks further progress in his political thinking and increases the distance between him and his grandfather. Here too there is much political discussion and many students feel as outraged as Coningsby because too much power has been stripped away from the Crown and the Church. Later when Coningsby has the chance to meet Millbank at his factory he discovers his grandfather's prejudices towards Millbank are unfounded. Everything Coningsby sees there impresses him, and the productive 'glory of Lancaster' is in marked contrast to the artificial world of Coningsby Castle. Millbank is one of Carlyle's 'Captains of Industry', an incredibly successful

and wealthy man. He is a model manufacturer who is attentive not only to his workers' safety but also seeks 'the moral and physical well being of his people'. His mills are designed to protect the environment from pollution; he has even built churches and schools for his employees. Disraeli believes men like these to be disciples of progress and the founders of the new order.

The Young England principles, although slow to form, are deep and lasting. Ever since his Eton days Coningsby has felt a policy 'sound and deep, fervent and well defined' is required in civil and religious life. Nothing mechanical can provide an adequate solution to the unhealthy climate. Like a hero out of Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-Worship, Coningsby finds the age wanting in deep belief in anything. Escape from this political maze comes through his friendship with Sidonia, the wisest and richest man in the world, who directs the main character to activity. Sidonia teaches Coningsby to believe in the efficacy of human actions and gives his pupil a Carlylean analysis of the times:

'The age does not believe in great men, because it does not possess any ... The Spirit of the Age is the very thing that a great man changes ...' (p.144)

Sidonia's teachings are unorthodox and counter to the political contrivances of the day. He teaches Coningsby that the vital ingredient lacking in England's political leadership is the imaginative aspect. England is in a deplorable condition because her political thinking is essentially utilitarian. Sidonia wants to shift political thinking away from the mechanical approach and to establish political leadership on a human basis. The secure future of Britain, Sidonia believes, lies in the promise of creative humanity and not in political tampering:

'There has been an attempt to reconstruct society on the basis of material motives and calculations. It has failed. It must ultimately have failed under any circumstances; its failure in an ancient and densely-peopled kingdom was inevitable ... Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions; never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination.' (p.262)

Sidonia reintroduces the dynamic doctrine which Carlyle had outlined in 'Signs of the Times':

'Man is made to adore and to obey; but if you will not command him, if you give him nothing to worship, he will fashion his own divinities, and find a chieftain in his own passions.' (p.262)

The political solution demands men with imagination and ideals and not the machine in whatever shape.

These heady ideas provide Coningsby with the political conviction which enables him to break free from his grandfather's influence. A row occurs when Coningsby refuses to accept Monmouth's offer to become MP for Hellingsly. Their dispute centres on politics and the ways Monmouth uses the political arena for personal gain. To Coningsby political office implies something larger and for this reason he rejects his grandfather's offer:

'What we want, sir, is not to fashion new dukes and furbish up old baronies, but to establish great principles which may maintain the realm and secure the happiness of the people.' (p.430)

Denied his inheritance by his grandfather, Coningsby is finally free from his links with the old generation. A significant movement in the novel occurs when Coningsby pursues a legal career after a life of dissipation. His vision comes to encircle the whole nation. He becomes a disciple of progress with a firm belief in a Toryism which

emphasises the progress for all which is the root of a true democracy:

'Nothing is great but the personal. As civilisation advances, the accidents of life become each day less important. The power of man, his greatness and his glory, depend upon essential qualities. Brains every day become more precious than blood. You must give men new ideas, you must teach them new words, you must modify their manners, you must change their laws, you must root out prejudices, subvert conventions, if you wish to be great.
(p.474)

Now Coningsby aims for greater things. His social vision is recognised by the manufacturer Millbank who offers him his parliamentary seat. The victory of the new generation is signalled as Coningsby easily defeats his old enemy, Rigby, in an election.

Disraeli's final argument comes through an interplay of characters rather than through a discursive investigation of politics. The important elements in the novel are the growth of Coningsby's imagination through his friendship with Sidonia, and the development of a total class consciousness including both industrialists and the lower classes. The marriage between Edith and Coningsby demonstrates the necessary union of the industrial bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, and comes straight out of the pages of Past and Present. This symbolic union is a device many of the social novelists employ with slightly different intentions. The novel closes with the new generation accepting leadership and poised for political and social action.

Sybil

In Sybil (1845), the second novel in the trilogy, there is a thematic progression from Coningsby. Whereas Coningsby deals with politics and

political leadership, Sybil deals with the condition of the people who are to be led. The subject matter in Sybil represents a social understanding greatly different from the glossy world outlined in Coningsby. This altered vision had several causes. In 1844 Disraeli inspected the working conditions in the northern industrial areas. Lord John Manners accompanied Disraeli on the tour and reported that the sights of the squalid working class dwellings left Disraeli 'profoundly moved'.¹⁵ Furthermore, by being in political office Disraeli could not help but learn about the condition of the country from reading the various reports presented by the Royal Commissions. He had every opportunity to hear the findings of some of the most significant Commission reports. These included the Factory Inspection Report (1839), Report of the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population (1842), and the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns (1844). Another reason for his deepening social concern may have been the climate of opinion created by the works of Thomas Carlyle, who by the middle of the 'hungry forties' was at the pinnacle of his prophetic powers. No one knows how much of Carlyle's works Disraeli may have read but he presumably appreciated their literary merit for when he was Prime Minister he offered Carlyle the Order of the Bath in 1874. Carlyle refused the honour.

In Sybil Disraeli tries to provide a solution to the problem of the two nations. He discerns a rift between the rich and the poor and notes the various points of conflict. The gap he describes is immense. Between the aristocracy and the working class:

'there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.'¹⁶

Sybil is a book whose task is to show that only the principles of Young England can bring lasting harmony.

To begin with, Sybil follows a similar pattern to Coningsby, where the old generation is contrasted with the new. Here however the conflict between the aristocracy is centred round a brotherly dispute reminiscent of the feud between Frederick and the Duke in Shakespeare's 'As You Like It'. Placing the two nations problem in terms of a brotherly quarrel reveals Disraeli's paternalism and underlines his contention that the aristocracy should be leading the rest of society instead of bickering among themselves.¹⁷

Sybil attacks a sham aristocracy which is more concerned with acquiring titles than with assuming proper leadership. An aristocracy devoted to outward wealth and blind to the social realities around them reminds one of similar points made by Carlyle in The French Revolution. Disraeli again asserts his opinion that the new conditions of the day demand a new type of leadership, which is found this time in Egremont, the chief representative of the new generation.

Much of Sybil is spent ridiculing the world of the rich which revolves round the lavish homes of the aristocracy. Here the leading protagonist of the do-nothing aristocracy is Lord Marney, a figure who is one of the most convincing characterisations of a fabulously rich, idle and heartless man. Disraeli uses Marney to demonstrate the fact that such aristocrats abuse their position and are aristocrats in name only. Marney is the classic case of the deluded aristocrat who wrongly believes that his title enables him to eschew all social responsibility. Marney is a much more extreme example of a vacuous aristocrat than Lord Monmouth, his counterpart in Coningsby, because selfishness has blinded

Marney to the point where he has no understanding of others. Monmouth's ignorance regarding the nation comes as a result of his time spent abroad. Marney on the other hand is totally uninterested in the harsh realities which exist outside his handsome and buffered world. He is a good example of one of Carlyle's indulgent aristocrats who fails to interpret correctly the social signs of the times.

Disraeli discredits Marney's rigid adherence to laissez-faire policies as Dickens does that of Mr. Gradgrind, but with far greater power. Marney may not have a statistical tower but his condescending conduct and reliance upon the national statistics and Malthusian economic theory places him in a similar position of ignorance. He dismisses the social unrest on his property as merely the result of 'surplus population', and too few soldiers instead of not enough food or proper wages. Lord Marney also attributes rick burning on his property to spontaneous combustion when in fact it is a symbol of the workers' unhappiness. Even worse is the fact that Marney justifies the scant wages he pays his employees with strict laissez-faire economics. The most important factor in employment, he roundly asserts, is job security and not wages:

'I say that a family can live well on seven shillings a-week, and on eight shillings very well indeed. The poor are very well off, at least the agricultural poor, very well of indeed. Their incomes are certain, that is a great point, and they have no cares, no anxieties; they always have a resource, they always have the House. People without cares do not require as much food as those whose life entails anxieties.
(pp.190-191)

Such self assured statements of 'fact' carry no meaning for Marney has never visited the agricultural poor and factories on his own property. Marney, like Gradgrind, or perhaps more like Bounderby, is

incapable of caring for others. This is supremely demonstrated in his marriage. Lady Marney has, like others, been forced to play a submissive role to her husband. Their blighted marriage has been childless - the result no doubt of Lord Marney's sexual and emotional impotence.

Other members of the aristocracy are presented and Disraeli sees no lasting political solutions arising from this quarter. The hollowness of the aristocracy is shown by the meteoric career of Lord Fitz-Warene. Years earlier he waited on tables at an exclusive club and met a man who left him his estate. Then by chance he secured a government post where he soon earned a title by voting with the king's party. Other aristocrats favour outdated principles and are hopelessly obsolete. The thoroughbred Lord De Mowbray opposes the levelling, democratic trends of the day. Mr. Berners reminisces on those good old days 'when members of Parliament had nobody to please and ministers of State nothing to do'. The dissipated character of most of the aristocracy is shown in the figures of Alfred Mountchesney and Lord Eugene De Vere, who lounge all day in their fine dining rooms and talk about pointless horse races they have attended, and purposely drink bad wines to lessen the tedium of their dull lives. Then of course there are Captain Grouse, Wriggle, Bombastes Rip and Thorough Base who have no time to hear about social issues and therefore join the ranks of those perennial political wall-flowers, Tadpole and Taper.

Matched against these despicable aristocrats are a group of figures who represent those who can bring political solutions to the 'two nations' problem. Here Disraeli not only offers his own ideas of Young England, but he also includes those of the Chartists and socialists.

This aspect gives the novel the feel of a political survey, something Kingsley emulates in Yeast, a novel with a similar purpose to Sybil.

The development of Egremont's political and social consciousness follows Coningsby's. He begins life with every social advantage. Early in the novel it seems he may follow in the frivolous footsteps of his brother. At Oxford he neglects his studies and develops 'extravagant tastes and habits'. An affair leaves him further dissatisfied and he goes abroad. Returning home, however, his life is revolutionised when he meets a group of individuals who radically change his thinking.

Notable among these figures is Aubrey St. Lys, the vicar of Mowbray whose involvement with the poor is in strong contrast to the remoteness of the aristocracy. St. Lys is part of Disraeli's polemic on behalf of the revitalisation of ancient institutions. Although he is from the oldest family in the area, he has dedicated himself to labour with the working classes. St. Lys's social criticism has a strong religious tone and like Henry Sydney and Eustace Lyle in Coningsby he asserts that the spirit of the Victorian industrial world finds no worth in religious forms and ceremonies:

'What you call forms and ceremonies represent the divinest instincts of our nature. Push your aversion to forms and ceremonies to a legitimate conclusion, and you would prefer kneeling in a barn rather than in a cathedral. Your tenets would strike at the very existence of all art, which is essentially spiritual. (p.146)

The church, St. Lys continues, has followed the same barren path as the aristocracy and retreated from social responsibility. The church must be revitalised so that it can help enlighten the people, and St. Lys's social work in the industrial areas points the way back for the

church. The maxim for the church 'Qui laborat, orat' is unmistakably similar to Carlyle's 'Laborare est Orare'.

Another aristocrat worthy of note, Mr. Trafford, has turned his talents to manufacturing instead of living a comfortable life of passivity. He is a 'dynamic' factory owner whose eyes are always keen to find 'new sources of wealth' but he has not allowed the pursuit of success to destroy the proper relations he has with his employees. Like Millbank, Trafford is a model manufacturer, but with an important difference. Trafford is a feudal manufacturer who combines his ancient blood and 'old English feelings' with the newest machinery. Trafford's model factory, like St. Lys's active religion, point the way forward for the country. It provides the very safest equipment and is even equipped with a modern ventilating system. More importantly, inside the factory there exists a complex supervisory system which does not allow the workers to be tied to the machines all day. Unlike Bounderby and Gradgrind, Mr. Trafford has not forgotten how the people live outside the factory. Like an old aristocratic landlord, he has made sure his employees have plots of land, wells, schools and churches. The results of such patronage produce the very highest moral character in this model village and factory town:

'There was not a single person in the village of a reprobate character. The men were well clad; the women had a blooming cheek; drunkenness was unknown; while the moral condition of the softer sex was proportionately elevated. (p.226)

Another important factor in Egremont's development occurs when he meets Walter Gerard, his daughter Sybil, and Stephen Morley, representatives of the working class who provide him with important details regarding the poor. The scene where Egremont meets them for the first

time is significant not simply for the fact that this section contains Disraeli's famous formulation of the 'two nations' problem. The scene is all the more important because the episode is a Past and Present in miniature. Here in the ruins of Marney Abbey Disraeli makes a similar comparison between the active lives of the monks and the lethargic status of the aristocracy as seen in the Marneys and the Mowbrays:

'You complain enough now of absentees. The monks were never non-resident. They expended their revenue among those whose labour had produced it. These holy men too built and planted as they did everything else for posterity : their churches were cathedrals; their schools colleges; their halls and libraries the muniment rooms of kingdoms; their woods and waters, their farms and gardens, were laid out and disposed on a scale and in a spirit that are now extinct; they made the country beautiful, and the people proud of their country.
(p.93)

Through Walter Gerard, Disraeli demonstrates that Chartism, although justified in many of its cries, is implausible as a social creed. However warranted the leaders' hatred of social injustice may be, they cannot change their world nor control the masses of people who back them. This problem is focused in Gerard. Though he is the director of a national movement he chooses to live a life of seclusion in a cottage, away from the factories, where he tends his garden. Gerard must be reconciled to the real world and this occurs after he is arrested in an uprising and jailed for eighteen months. The months of imprisonment are not wasted. The confinement allows Gerard to temper his views and, like Charles Kingsley's hero Alton Locke, he renounces social agitation and adopts moral force.

Stephen Morley's socialist views present another alternative solution to the problem of the 'two nations'. Morley is an Owenite who wants to alter radically the social structure of the country. These

views pose the greatest threat to Disraeli's feudal understanding. Morley's ideas challenge the concept of the family, a concept sacred to Disraeli and the Victorians. 'Home', Morley says, 'is a barbarous idea; the method of a rude age; home is isolation : therefore anti-social. What we want is community.' (p.238) Morley's thinking defies the Young England philosophy because it eliminates the heroic dimension altogether. The novel dismisses these political ideas as illusions by showing that Morley only understands dead theories instead of living individuals. Morley despises Egremont simply because of the latter's aristocratic links. Moreover, his efforts to win Sybil's love are void of passion, and sound as calculated as Gradgrind's advice to his daughter in Hard Times. Disraeli proves the worthlessness of Morley's textbook philosophy by showing him to be a lonely and isolated man advocating a socialist philosophy, at heart a person pursuing his own good rather than the good of others.

Egremont's most important relationship is with Sybil, a deeply religious woman with whom he falls in love and finally marries. Like St. Lys, Sybil represents the active spiritual qualities which distinguished the church of the past and this motif is reinforced by her close association with abbeys, churches, and the monastery from which she draws inspiration. Her moral goodness is admired by all classes of men but in particular the factory workers and the unemployed she cares for. The solution to the 'two nations' problem lies in the marriage of Egremont and Sybil which is symbolic on two levels. Firstly, their marriage provides a fusion of the political and religious concepts needed to unite the 'two nations'. The wedding is therefore slightly different from the marriage of manners and industry which Mrs. Gaskell uses in the conclusion of North and South. Secondly, the marriage

demonstrates that the 'two nations' are indeed one. Wills are recovered which prove that Sybil and her father are actually the true heirs to all of Mowbray. The ascendancy of Sybil therefore becomes symbolic of the new position workers could enjoy. Such a device however detracts from the major argument of the novel. The fact that Sybil has been an aristocrat all along discredits the image of unity between the aristocracy and the workers. The relevant contrast is with Magwitch's revelation to Pip in Great Expectations. Where Disraeli's disclosure allows his characters to leave the working classes, Magwitch's return forces Pip back to the realities of the nineteenth century life and work.

Sybil and 'The Poor'

Having examined the aristocracy it is only appropriate that we now turn our attention to the poor in Sybil. One has to say that Disraeli's working class figures in Sybil are far better than those in Coningsby. Here he successfully produces a national panorama by providing scenes from both rural and industrial life. Although his pictures of poverty are always one dimensional, there is a sense of wholeness in Sybil due to the contrasts between classes. Before examining these pictures however one must first be clear about the author's intentions. The guiding principle behind each of these sketches is the Young England philosophy. These social pictures are provided to reinforce the author's point of view that the horrible social realities which he describes could have been avoided if there had been an aristocracy properly motivated by the principles of noblesse oblige. Disraeli's main reason for providing these scenes is to shake a complacent aristocracy into action by drawing attention to the poor who need to be guided and governed. He is not

concerned with introducing the poor as Charles Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell supremely do. Though Disraeli's pictures of the working class are stereotyped and distorted, they provide a useful starting point in our discussion about the poor.

Disraeli's willingness to generalise about the poor was a consequence of his reliance upon parliamentary reports for much of his social knowledge. This factor alone makes Disraeli the most remote of the social novelists because these second hand sources placed him furthest away from the subject he described. The distance between writer and subject widened when Disraeli integrated these reports into his overall social argument rather than using them as a stimulus for greater social investigation. The First Report from the Midland Mining Commission, for example, is cited more than twenty times in Sybil.¹⁸ Often whole sections from reports are only slightly adapted and placed within the context of the novel. At other times Disraeli altered them to give further emphasis to points he was trying to establish. Disraeli's heavy utilisation of official reports made him unusual as a social novelist. The other social novelists distrusted their validity because they felt that individuals were drowned in a torrent of factual evidence. Carlyle expressed the general suspicion of statistics in 'Chartism':

'We have looked into various statistic works, Statistic-Society Reports, Poor-Law Reports and Pamphlets not a few, with a sedulous eye to this question of the Working Classes and their general condition in England; we grieve to say, with as good as no result whatever. Assertion swallows assertion; according to the old Proverb, 'as the statist thinks, the bell clinks'.¹⁹

These two factors then, aristocratic paternalism and his reliance upon official sources, help explain why Disraeli's working class characters are nothing more than shadows.

In Sybil working class life is always viewed in the light of the aristocracy. Working class figures are rarely allowed to escape the paternal strings which control them like puppets. Agricultural degradation is blamed on the greedy policies of Lord Marney and people like him who force people off the land to resettle in nearby villages. Here Disraeli focuses on the cottages which the local aristocracy has neglected and which are unable to provide proper physical shelter or spiritual protection. Some of the lodgings are delapidated inside and out and said to resemble dungheaps. Even worse, these homes are overcrowded and whole families are obliged to live in one room. What makes this word picture particularly memorable is that inside this collapsing shell, an expectant mother, in need of refuge, is about to give birth. These decaying homes are in great contrast to Lord Marney's comfortable world. At this point Disraeli resorts to biblical language or quasi-biblical language and uses the phrases 'virtuous mother', 'sacred pangs of childbirth', and 'the hour of travail' to further emphasise his hostility towards a negligent aristocracy, the agents of 'our thoughtless civilisation':

'With the water streaming down the walls, the light distinguished through the roof, with no hearth even in winter, the virtuous mother in the sacred pangs of childbirth, gives forth another victim to our thoughtless civilization; surrounded by three generations whose inevitable presence is more painful than her sufferings in that hour of travail; while the father of her coming child, in another corner of the sordid chamber, lies stricken by that typhus which his contaminating dwelling has breathed into his veins, and for whose next prey is perhaps destined, his new-born child.' (p.81)

The passage above is memorable but the biblical allusion makes the scene unnecessarily dramatic and overstated. It is notable that only one voice is heard from the agricultural world; a local farmer shrugs his

shoulders and says the rick burnings signify 'hard times for the poor'. The blanket of silence over the rural workers is in sharp contrast to Kingsley's Alton Locke which focuses on the causes of labour unrest among the agricultural poor.

Another cluster of images revolves round the industrial town of Mowbray, a community dominated by factories and coal mines. Here Disraeli's rank accounts of urban life find a similarity with Dickens's, especially the latter's grim pictures of Hard Times nearly ten years later. The great similarity between the two accounts is that both stress the horrible fact that the workers blend into the machinery itself:

'Far as the eye could reach, and the region was level, except where a range of limestone hills formed its distant limit, a wilderness of cottages or tenements that were hardly entitled to a higher name, were scattered for many miles over the land; some detached, some connected in little rows, some clustering in groups, yet rarely forming continuous streets, but interspersed with blazing furnaces, heaps of burning coal, and piles of smouldering ironstone; while forges and engine chimneys roared and puffed in all directions, and indicated the frequent presence of the mouth of the mine and the bank of the coal-pit. (p.177)

The pictures of urban life at Mowbray are clearer than the agricultural descriptions. Yet even here Disraeli's portrayals are weak; although he provides an imaginative picture of an industrial city, none of his working class scenes comes close to resembling those of Stephen Blackpool and Rachael which Dickens provides in Hard Times. The novel moves away from these industrial images to focus on some of the local inhabitants through whom is conveyed the harshness of life. These voices - and that is all they are - provide further evidence for Disraeli's social argument. Through Mrs. Carey, a street trader, we

learn that wages are so low that entire families have to work in order to survive. The oppressive conditions lead others to low life to diminish the hopelessness of their work. Here two children give an indication of what the working conditions are like. One girl has been injured by one of the exposed shuttles in the factory. A young boy must take a bath in the river every day because he is covered in sweat and filth. Here too dwells Devilsdust, a factory foundling. Further discontent results from the oppressive tommy-shop in Mowbray which forces the workers to purchase overpriced and inferior goods.

In Mowbray the voice of Warner the weaver is heard above the others and further illustrates how bad conditions are. Like many of the weavers of his day Warner suffers great hardship. He earns the ridiculous sum of a penny an hour and trade is so bad he can do little to lessen his poverty. His wife and children lie sick in the corner of his bare home and their suffering is worsened by a lack of food and fuel. Warner however is only a type and Disraeli never introduces anything personal about him. No weaver ever used the kind of language he does; as in the case of the pregnant mother the language is inappropriate for the scene and betrays the fact that Disraeli in truth knows very little about the working class:

'I was born to labour, and I was ready to labour. I loved my loom and my loom loved me. It gave me a cottage in my native village, surrounded by a garden of whose claims on my solitude it was not jealous. There was time for both. It gave me for a wife the maiden that I had ever loved; and it gathered my children round my hearth with plentifulness and peace. I was content : I sought no other lot. It is not adversity that makes me look back upon the past with tenderness.' (pp.150-151)

Disraeli provides a fascinating picture of proletarian life when he describes the despicable conditions coal miners are subjected to in

the coal-pits. Here again Disraeli's main intention is to provide factual information and the passage links up with the agricultural picture to portray a wicked world where mothers and children suffer in the fields and down the mines:

'They came forth : the mine delivers its gang and the pit its bondsmen; the forge is silent and the engine is still. The plain is covered with the swarming multitude : bands of stalwart men, broad-chested and muscular, wet with toil, and black as the children of the tropics; troops of youth-alas! of both sexes, - though neither their raiment nor their language indicates the difference; all are clad in male attire; and oaths that men might shudder at, issue from lips born to breathe words of sweetness. Yet these are to be - some are - the mothers of England! But can we wonder at the hideous coarseness of their language when we remember the savage rudeness of their lives? Naked to the waist, an iron chain fastened to a belt of leather runs between their legs clad in canvas trousers, while on hands and feet an English girl, for twelve, sometimes for sixteen hours a-day, hauls and hurries tubs of coal up subterranean roads, dark, precipitous, and plashy : circumstances that seem to have escaped the notice of the Society for the Abolition of Negro Slavery.' (p.178)

As with the factory scenes, Disraeli also cites some of the individual complaints of the miners. At an alehouse some of the angry miners grumble about the hard nature of their work, the injustices of the truck system, the low wages, and the frustration of being trapped in a system where it is nearly impossible to present their grievances to their employers. One of the colliers puts his finger on the problem when he says 'atween the poor man and the gentleman there never was no connection, and that's the vital mischief of this country'. Disraeli makes no mistake in using the word 'connection', the same word which Manners used in his poem 'England's Trust' to sum up the benefits Young England would bring. Disraeli's pictures of Marney and Mowbray then are factually informative but remote and mesh with the author's overall

political vision. The poor are seen as either 'types', as Warner is, or as mouthpieces of information, as Mrs. Carey and Devilsdust are, when they tell us about the tommy-shop.

A noticeable difference between Disraeli and the other social novelists is that he is not able to invigorate his working class characters with human qualities. The closest Disraeli can come is in describing the drink and entertainment of 'The Temple of the Muses' where Dandy Mick and others go. The widest contrast is with Charles Kingsley and Mrs. Gaskell. Disraeli would have flinched at the prospect of centring a novel round a Chartist as in Alton Locke. Nor would he have tried to emulate the novels of Mrs. Gaskell whose intimate settings of Manchester streets clash with the idealised mechanical world Disraeli describes in Coningsby. Whereas Coningsby proclaims Manchester 'the most wonderful city of all times' because of its modern factories and machines, Mrs. Gaskell knowingly builds her novels round a 'big smoky place' inhabited by individuals who possess dignity and feeling. A character like Boucher, from Mrs. Gaskell's North and South, the oppressed factory worker driven to suicide because of the Union's pressure on him, would be beyond Disraeli's literary abilities. Disraeli wrote most freely when he was discussing the aristocracy. When it came to depicting the working classes he consulted a heap of blue books which made his lower class characters stereotyped, stale and lifeless. Understandably then their voices are only momentarily audible. Disraeli's most lucid pictures of the working class are from Wodgate, a town he created to demonstrate to his readers just how harsh life could be in a city or village lacking a true aristocracy. Wodgate is Disraeli's nightmare, an imaginary town based on the godless materialism which is in danger of contaminating other parts of the country. Wodgate is

Disraeli's most energetic description because the place represents the chief threat to Young England.

England, Disraeli thinks, is in danger of becoming like Wodgate if her political and religious institutions decline further. The town is celebrated world-wide for its production of iron and brass but underneath the material success there is an oppressive society. Wodgate is referred to by residents as 'Hell-house yard' and described as the ugliest spot in England for good reason. The descriptions of working conditions, inhabitants and customs reveal the peculiar traits of a heathen people. Here there is an aristocracy of labour which barbarically holds sway over others. Workers are treated like slaves with little chance for advancement. There the masters keep the labourers working under the threat of physical abuse, often in the most cruel manner. The master workmen sometimes beat their apprentices with ropes and hammers or pull their ears till blood runs down their faces. The workers lack the physical strength to rise up and beat the system because they are fed bad food and are too fatigued by their tedious labour to revolt. The rhythm of their lives is marked by extremes : four days of work are followed by drunkenness on the other three.

Blame is placed on the lack of a proper aristocracy. No institutions exist to ease the workers harsh lives. The unyielding spirit of the place makes everyone mind his own business. Widespread ignorance fuels further alarm. It is common for people to have forgotten their age, or even their names. Here workers are ignorant of even the most basic tenets of Christianity. One person has a most amazing creed:

'I be a reg'lar born Christian and my mother afore
me, and that's what few gals in the Yard can say.
Thomas will take to it himself when work is slack;

and he believes now in our Lord and Saviour Pontius Pilate who was crucified to save our sins; and in Moses, Goliath, and the rest of the Apostles.' (p.208)

In the absence of a true aristocracy or church, a base one is erected to fill the vacuum. Hatton, called the bishop by others, is a shadowy character who runs his lock and mill shop with the same tenacity as Fagin oversees the thieves' den. Here the miseries of apprenticeship are vividly shown. Hatton keeps his young workers busy by threats of violence and the arched backs and scars testify to his cruelty. His workshop is terribly tedious. The reference to the monotonous work habits shown by the constant noise and movement of file and hammer concentrate the mind of the reader just as did the churning pistons in Dickens's Hard Times.

Wide then are the divisions between the rich and the poor in Sybil and Disraeli like Carlyle says that the gulf can only be narrowed if vigilant aristocrats like Egremont, socially conscious ministers such as St. Lys, and benevolent manufacturers like Mr. Trafford take responsibility for both the country and the city.

Tancred

Tancred (1847) was the final novel in the trilogy and Disraeli's favourite. Not everyone shared the author's enthusiasms. Carlyle thought the book ridiculous and wondered how long such an absurd novelist would be allowed to dance on John Bull's chest.²⁰ The novel was primarily religious in tone, an enlargement of the Hebraeo-Christian discussions previously spoken by Sidonia, Eustace Lyle and St. Lys. Tancred tries to do for religion what Coningsby does for politics. Disraeli's mind turned to such questions because at the time of composition the Young England group

had broken up. He therefore attempted to reconstruct the most fundamental tenets upon which valid political principles could be subsequently based. Britain, he felt, stood at a crossroads. The country had lost all belief in historic traditions and now political discussions were based on whatever was expedient. In creating a story about the discovery of a sound religious philosophy, the author drew an intentional parallel to the values of the country.

The novel shows how far the Utilitarian philosophy has warped society. Tancred, as Disraeli's male heroes before him, rejects an early political career because of the amorphous nature of politics. Tancred believes that spiritual values have been replaced by materialistic ones:

'I think I know what ought to be most valued in Europe; it is something very different from what I fear I must confess is most valued there. My cheek burns while I say it; but I think, in Europe, what is most valued is money.'²¹

Significantly, as Tancred rejects the nation's money-grubbing values he begins to ask himself the same questions of meaning as Carlyle's heroes had done. Tancred looks to the wisdom of the East in order to find enlightenment. His quest takes him on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre. It is necessary for Tancred to go abroad for he, like Lancelot in Kingsley's Yeast, must learn the true spiritual and political principles of Christianity before he can return. On the way he meets Fakredeen, a charismatic Arab whose 'love of action' makes him Tancred's perfect complement. Tancred soon meets Eva, who becomes his 'guide and inspiration'. They lead him to Mt. Sinai after a series of battles, where he is able to pray to God for inspiration. His pilgrimage is finally complete when he receives a message from heaven, thereby

establishing a valid religious philosophy. The West must be infused with the values of the East and this occurs symbolically with the marriage of Tancred and Eva! Like Coningsby and Edith and Egremont and Sybil, they become the pattern for the new aristocracy which will lead the country successfully by combining the spiritual wisdom of the East with the industrial concerns of the West.

Conclusion

Disraeli's political trilogy offered a solution to the 'two nations' problem by introducing a reformed aristocracy. By reviving ancient paternalistic feelings among the aristocracy, Disraeli believed that relations between the classes were bound to improve. The belief in an aristocracy driven by the principles of noblesse oblige placed Disraeli in agreement with Carlyle's idea of an enlightened aristocracy, although the novelist's ideas were far more romanticised. Indeed, Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred were but the chief components of an Arcadian vision.

At the conclusion of the trilogy Disraeli turned his full attention to politics and did not write another novel until Lothair appeared in 1870, a gap of over twenty years. Dickens among others regretted this lack of literary output. Disraeli abandoned fiction for the sake of implementing the ideals outlined in his political novels. By supporting factory legislation and other laws which improved working arrangements and sanitary conditions, Disraeli was able to put new wine into old wineskins.

This was only one of several responses to the 'condition of England' question, one limited to aristocratic characters and

parliamentary blue books, one far removed from the real poverty he inadequately described. In order to achieve a broader and altogether different perception of the output of the social novelists we shall now consider Mrs. Gaskell's social novels.

Footnotes to Chapter Three

1. Paul Bloomfield, Disraeli, Writers and Their Work, 138, Longman, 1961, p.23.
2. Thom Braun, Disraeli The Novelist, George Allen and Unwin, 1982, p.79.
3. André Maurois, Disraeli : A Picture of the Victorian Age (1936), translated by Hamish Miles, Time-Life Books, 1965, p.156.
4. Maurois, p.157.
5. Braun, p.75.
6. Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot, Yale University Press, 1981, p.58.
7. Walter Sichel, Disraeli : A Study in Personality and Ideas, Methuen and Co., 1904, p.126. Carlyle's judgement is also worth citing:

'... On the whole, if 'Young England' would altogether fling its shovel-hat into the lumber-room, much more cast its purple stockings to the nettles, and honestly recognising what was dead ... address itself frankly to the magnificent but as yet chaotic Future ... telling men at every turn that it knew and saw for ever clearly the body of the Past to be dead (and even to be damnable, if it pretended to be still alive and to go about in a galvanic state), what achievement might not 'Young England' manage for us!'
8. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1848), reprinted in The Victorian Prophets, edited by Peter Keating, Fontana, 1981, p.137.
9. Maurois, p.35.
10. Braun, p.8.
11. See Arthur H. Frietzshe, 'The Monstrous Clever Young Men : The Novelist Disraeli and His Heroes', Utah State University Press, Logan, No.3, Volume VII, December 1959.
12. Robert Blake, 'Disraeli's Political Novels', History Today, No.7, Volume XVI, July 1966, p.467.
13. Benjamin Disraeli, Coningsby (1844), Harmondsworth, 1983, p.219. All references to this edition.
14. Braun, p.77.
15. Sheila Smith, The Other Nation, p.230.

16. Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil (1845), Harmondsworth, 1980, p.96.
All references to this edition.
17. The image of sibling rivalry as symbolic of the 'two nations' problem is worth keeping in mind because each social novelist employs his or her own metaphor. Kingsley uses the image of sibling rivalry but he sees this rivalry in religious terms and therefore evokes the Jacob-Esau story. Mrs. Gaskell keeps the religious theme and uses the Dives-Lazarus parable. Dickens's focus is more resolutely on the social structure and the idea of the gentleman.
18. Martin Fido, 'From His Own Observation' : Sources of Working Class Passages in Disraeli's 'Sybil', Modern Language Review, Volume 2, 1977, p.275.
19. Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism' (1839), reprinted in Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, p.157.
20. Maurois, p.273.
21. Benjamin Disraeli, Tancred (1847), Bradenham Edition, 1926-27, p.199.

Chapter Four

Mrs. Gaskell and Unitarianism

The second of our authors, Mrs. Gaskell, was perfectly suited to be a social novelist. She spent the greater part of her life in Manchester, the one British city more than any other symbolic of the industrial age. Her lifelong work with her husband's ministry in Manchester enabled her to gain sensitive insights into the lives and habits of the Mancunian poor which eluded most of those who studied or wrote about the industrial working class.

Early Experiences

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, was born on September the 29th, 1810 at Cheyne Walk in Chelsea. She was the daughter of William Stevenson, a Unitarian minister who left the church for farming because he did not believe ministers should be paid for their services. Her mother died only a month after Elizabeth's birth and she was entrusted to her aunt who lived in Knutsford, Cheshire. Here she lived a quiet life in a country town which provided material for later novels.

The most important event in Elizabeth's life occurred in 1832 when she married the Rev. William Gaskell, a brilliant Unitarian minister and teacher. Their marriage was significant because this helped to reinforce her faith and more importantly launched her into active social work, factors which were a stimulus to her social novels. The Rev. Gaskell's zeal for social reform was demonstrated by his eagerness to take education to the working classes. His wide learning led to his appointment as lecturer in English Literature for the Working Men's College in

Manchester, and he was also Professor of English History and Literature at Manchester New College. He helped to organise educational classes round the four Unitarian chapels in the city. In this way he shared the same philanthropic goals as F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley of the Christian Socialists. Together the Gaskells ministered to their parishioners through a variety of ministries, schools and lectures. They were a great example of those dedicated to the needs of the poor. Unitarianism was a moving force in Mrs. Gaskell's life and literary career and therefore requires further discussion.

Unitarianism

The Unitarians were part of the middle class response to social unrest and they along with other religious groups were motivated by the desire 'to evangelize and civilize those who seemed to have been deprived of the Christian message by the growth of the population, by the results of the wandering of the people or the failures of the previous centuries'.¹

The Unitarians were a small but influential religious body. In the Rev. William Gaskell's congregation, Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, there were seven mayors, fifteen members of parliament, and some of the most prominent manufacturers of the city. Often they too took part in advocating social reform and indeed many of the manufacturers were considered model factory owners.

Unitarianism differed from conformist religion in some significant ways. The Unitarians held different doctrinal beliefs from the Established church and these differences centred round the nature of God and man. Following the theological traditions of Socinus, the Unitarians

denied the doctrines of the Trinity and therefore the divinity of Christ. In their view Christ had established a pattern to follow on earth rather than a devotional religion. Moreover the Unitarians viewed God as chiefly benevolent and this benevolence extended into their doctrine of man. They rejected the dogma of original sin and affirmed man's essential goodness. The Unitarians also differed from the orthodox church in their emphasis on conduct instead of creed. In their estimation the practical sphere of religion was far more important than the speculative. These differences were born out when William Wilberforce the evangelical met John Cartwright the Unitarian in Westminster in 1801. At the close of their conversation Wilberforce said he hoped they would meet in a better world to which Cartwright retorted he hoped first to make this world better.² According to Unitarian thinking, what an individual did mattered more than what a person knew and therefore a life spent based on the truth became a prototype for all believers. The stress on living and speaking the 'truth' was an important factor in Mrs. Gaskell's novels. Furthermore the dual emphasis on man's goodness and on a religion rooted in reality had radical social implications for the individual believer. This factor is demonstrated in a fragment from the Rev. Gaskell's sermon entitled 'Duties of the Individual'. The Unitarian who does not fulfill his social obligations, Gaskell says:

'is unfaithful to society, to his country, to his race; and does violence to his own nature. He slights the voice of God which speaks to him through these; despises the law written by the divine finger on his heart; and heeds not the Christian precepts.'³

In proclaiming an unsectarian religion the Unitarians also felt they could ease the hostility between social classes. Because they gave less

credence to doctrine, they did not divide people into political or religious sects. They believed that the social divisions which did exist were the result of class ignorance and that such enmity could be lessened through the spreading of knowledge. Therefore the Unitarians emphasised education and gave lectures the status once reserved for sermons and prayers. It was for these reasons that Mrs. Gaskell stressed the importance of class understanding, communication and active Christian service in her novels.

Gaskell the Novelist

It was personal tragedy that compelled Mrs. Gaskell to write. Her only son Willie died of scarlet fever in 1845 and her husband advised her to begin writing because he realised the force of concentration would soothe her troubled mind. Her first novel Mary Barton (1848) made her an instant celebrity and placed her in contact with an élite Victorian literary circle comprising Carlyle, Dickens and Thackeray. Her other social novel, North and South, appeared seven years later and added further to her discussion on industrialism. Her contribution to the 'condition of England' question was an important one, if only because most of those who wrote about it were men. Her literary pictures of northern life gave the social novel a wider scope and helped her audience to realise that social unrest existed throughout all parts of the country. The various word pictures which the social writers provided from Manchester, Eversley and London helped produce the feeling of a national consensus. Mrs. Gaskell however was not restricted to writing social novels about industrialism and in her life she produced a wide range of fiction. In between her social novels she composed Ruth (1853) which discussed the problem of prostitution. Kingsley regarded the

story with total satisfaction saying it was composed with 'beauty and righteousness'.⁴ Cranford (1851) and Wives and Daughters (1864) were her greatest works and demonstrated her ability to capture the atmosphere of English village life. Her fine biography The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857) further established her genius. Her literary versatility revealed both her skill and depth as an artist and it is significant that Dickens came pleading to her in an effort to persuade her to contribute to his journal Household Words.⁵

As Disraeli used the novel to fictionalise his political philosophy, so Mrs. Gaskell employed the novel to spread her broad principles of religion which she felt could seal the cracks in British society. Whereas Disraeli's trilogy emphasised a social union between the aristocracy and the workers, Mrs. Gaskell's two social novels proposed that social harmony could only come about through a revival of a socially conscious Christianity which sought to break down the artificial barriers in British society. A main element in this process was communication between the classes, something Mrs. Gaskell obviously knew the benefits of because of her work in Manchester. Whereas Kingsley hurried up to London to throw his weight behind the sanitation work in Bermondsey, Mrs. Gaskell turned to fiction and wrote with the purpose of enlightening her audience about the true condition of the working classes, thereby encouraging benevolent action.

Mary Barton and North and South

Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855) offered a solution to the 'two nations' problem. Both novels emphasised the need for further communication between classes and demonstrated the terrible human and social results which could occur when these channels were broken.

Mary Barton took up this position from the workers' point of view whereas North and South for the most part sought to reveal more of the manufacturers' stance. Significantly both novels centred on individuals; that North and South was originally entitled Margaret Hale indicates the message of individual reform which both novels presented. Mrs. Gaskell's emphasis on working class individuality placed her fully at odds with her contemporary Friedrich Engels. Both writers graphically detailed the filth, disease and death in Manchester but Mrs. Gaskell's accounts were radically different because they contained a wider range of the kinds of people and experiences which existed in the city. For these reasons cotton workers 'clubbed up' to buy copies of Mary Barton because they felt her novel alone captured the gamut of their existence.⁶ The Condition of the Working Class in England (1844) was more a social history which looked to the economic laws of history. Here for instance the working classes were huddled together for the purpose of showing their growing sense of militancy in the face of poverty. Mrs. Gaskell's works by contrast offered portraits of the working class as individuals which reveal them to possess feeling, thought and personality and to remain dignified in suffering. Such distinctions cast doubt on Engels' claim to know Manchester as well as his home in the Rhineland. Engels after all was an outsider and therefore his experiences of the city were limited. Another limiting factor was that The Condition of the Working Class in England was published after only two years of observation when Engels was twenty four years old. Mrs. Gaskell by contrast was thirty five when she wrote Mary Barton and had lived in Manchester for nearly fifteen years. Engels's nationality and the shortness of his stay in Manchester did not allow him to recognise the peculiar customs and traditions of the English poor, considerations extremely important for Mrs. Gaskell.⁷

Mary Barton

Mary Barton was published in the 'year of revolutions' and printed in times of working class unrest resulting from poor harvests, economic recessions and mass unemployment, all of which contributed to the 'hungry forties'. Mary Barton was Mrs. Gaskell's first novel and was written in response to what she saw happening around her in Manchester. She was so concerned with the breakdown in labour relations in her home city that she turned from writing a story about Yorkshire to writing a tale about Manchester life. This occasional element therefore places the novel in the same mould as Carlyle's Past and Present written immediately after his visits to Bury St. Edmunds.

Mary Barton is an ambitious novel because it seeks to show the problem of poverty from the workers' point of view. The novel is prompted by her empathy with the workers who daily pass her on the streets. She says in the preface to the novel: 'I have always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstance, apparently in even greater degree than other men.' This approach through sympathy is the very opposite to that used by Carlyle and Disraeli. Carlyle describes the working classes as needful of guidance by the upper classes and pictures the lower classes as large in muscle but deficient in intelligence. In 'Chartism' for example, Carlyle depicts the working classes as 'wild inarticulate souls, struggling there, with inarticulate uproar, like dumb creatures in pain, unable to speak what is in them'.⁸ Similarly Disraeli's scenes of working class life are only one dimensional and used for the sake of reinforcing his chivalric paternalism. Mrs. Gaskell on the contrary knew the poor and consequently when she uses the word 'dumb' it is used

with an entirely different reference point from Carlyle's. For Mrs. Gaskell 'dumb' refers to the muted thoughts and feelings of the workers instead of being a condescending reproach.' In Mary Barton she hopes 'to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses the dumb people'. In describing the thoughts and habits of the working classes, Mrs. Gaskell graphically details what Disraeli can only briefly mention through Morley's 'two-nation' pronouncement in Sybil. One contemporary critic pinpointed the wide difference in method between Disraeli and Gaskell when he said Disraeli knew the working classes as 'a traveller knows the botany of a strange country' whereas Mrs. Gaskell knew it as 'an ardent naturalist knows the flora of his own neighborhood'.⁹

In Mary Barton Mrs. Gaskell offers her own interpretation of the 'condition of England' question. She evokes the Dives-Lazarus parable from the New Testament which demonstrates that the callous attitude of the rich towards the poor shall not go unpunished. The Dives-Lazarus parable is used to show the brooding sense of indignation which grows in the minds of the working classes and in men like John Barton, the author's most sympathetic figure. It is a powerful account and Mrs. Gaskell employs this biblical allusion with the same force as Carlyle's Irish widow or Dickens's Jo, other figures who also fell into the Dives-Lazarus chasm. The novel focuses the Dives-Lazarus parable in the life of the weaver John Barton and by tracing his life of social deprivation the reader is made aware of how overwhelming the industrial distress is in Manchester. Furthermore, the novel vividly describes how economic hardship affects the workers and produces a variety of responses; some hostile and others humane. It is an impressive and realistic account which shows the alienation and anger that result from

the lack of communication between classes. Since John Barton is one of the main characters, it is indeed appropriate that he express the dominant theme of the novel:

'No, I tell you, it's the poor, and the poor only, as does such things for the poor. Don't think to come over me with the old tale, that the rich know nothing of the trials of the poor. I say, if they don't know they ought to know. We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows; and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us.'¹⁰

The account of John Barton's decline is staggering and as the novel progresses we watch his pleasures decrease and his misfortunes increase. By showing economic hardship through John Barton's eyes, Mrs. Gaskell presents working class existence in an animated way. The first blow to befall Barton occurs when his pregnant wife unexpectedly dies as a result of never having properly adjusted to the unnatural rhythms of city life. Barton alone and grieving begins to think of the numerous hardships his wife had to endure and angrily recalls the severity of 'her daily round of duties'. The 'two worlds' theme returns to his mind again:

'Large houses are still occupied, while spinners' and weavers' cottages stand empty, because the families that once occupied them are obliged to live in rooms or cellars. Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers, while the workman loiters away his unemployed time in watching these things, and thinking of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing children asking in vain for enough of food, of the sinking health, of the dying life of those near and dear to him. The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?' (p.59)

We have heard this before at the beginning of Past and Present where Carlyle describes how 'England is full of wealth', with 'unabated bounty' and 'waving with yellow harvests' yet 'dying of inanition'. The major difference however between both accounts is that Carlyle views the 'two worlds' theme from the top of the social pyramid whereas Mrs. Gaskell's tale is from one of the lowest possible points.

Matters worsen for Barton when trade slackens and the factory where he works is forced to close. Unable to find work elsewhere, he begins to see that in times of hardship the poor suffer while the rich prosper. One afternoon Barton is walking in the streets looking for employment and is in desperate need of good food for his sick son. He stops by a marketshop window and stares hopelessly inside because he has no money to buy needed provisions. Suddenly his employer's wife comes out of the shop overladen with food for a party. Barton's lot is altogether different. He returns to an empty and cold home and finds his son dead. The contrast is shockingly explicit.

The Dives-Lazarus theme is further evoked when a factory in the town burns down. The owners, Mr. Carson and his son, decide that because trade is so bad it is more profitable for them to replace their outdated equipment than to employ the workers. What aggravates matters further is that the workers are never given an explanation as to why these actions are taken.

The most memorable episode from the Dives-Lazarus theme is the picture of the Davenport's cellar dwelling in contrast to the Carson mansion. News reaches Barton that an unemployed millworker is sick and he and his family are in desperate need of help. Although Barton does not know the man, he does everything he can to meet the sick man's

need. In a section which reads like something out of Mayhew's nearly contemporary work 'London Labour and the London Poor' we are taken to one of the worst parts of Manchester where Davenport lies dying. There the sanitation is so bad that ashes have to be spread on the street to prevent infection. Mrs. Gaskell's middle class strictures momentarily get the better of her when she describes the streets merely as filled with 'slops of every description'; this recalls the sanitised view of city life which Disraeli preferred, but this is the sole point of similarity. In the cellar dwelling Davenport is sick with the fever and lies on a bed of damp straw with his wife and children huddled in the corner. Barton is so outraged by the scene he returns home to pawn what few valuables remain in his home to buy the dying Davenport food. Realising he can do more, Barton sets out for the pharmacist for medical assistance. Walking up London Road, one of the wealthier streets in Manchester, Barton cannot fail to notice the awful contrasts between the gay lighted shops filled with customers and 'the dim gloomy cellar' he has just left. Davenport's death causes further anger and Barton begins to question the principles upon which society is built:

'John Barton's overpowering thought, which was to work out his fate on earth, was rich and poor; why are they so separate, so distinct, when God has made them all? It is not His will, that their interests are so far apart. Whose doing is it?
(p.219)

Jem Wilson, a fellow worker and Barton's best friend, has a similar experience when he goes to Carson's estate to secure an infirmary note for Davenport. The entire atmosphere surrounding the Carson household is one of careless ease and relaxation. No expense has been spared inside or outside the house. When the impoverished Wilson arrives at

the Carsons' it is not merely a contrast between rich and poor but also an embodiment of the Dives-Lazarus parable. In the kitchen the workers joke while they prepare the day's meals. Mrs. Carson's first decisions of the day are for more milk in her coffee and more butter on her rolls. Out in the library Mr. Carson and his son leisurely leaf through newspapers, passing the morning hours away in comfort. At this point the novel's criticism gathers momentum. Carson's indifference to his workers is revealed when he says he doesn't know the name of his workers, nor does he seem to care about their health as is shown by his refusal to issue an urgent medical note. The carelessness and temporary measures of the Carsons are emphasised when Carson's son gives Wilson a few shillings and wrongly thinks he has fulfilled his social responsibility. Carson repeats the same miscalculation as does Lord Marney in Sybil who thinks his workers are content with the miserable salary of seven shillings a week. It is therefore appropriate that both characters die in a similar fashion and by the hands of those they have offended.

Mrs. Gaskell was telling the truth about the manufacturers of her day. Ample evidence exists which attests that the factory system in Manchester was not conducive to encouraging good relationships between masters and men. Another contemporary of Mrs. Gaskell's, *the Rev. R. Parkinson*, a Canon of Manchester, perhaps best summarised the point when he said there 'is less personal communication between the master cotton spinner and his workmen ... than there is between the Duke of Wellington and the humblest labourer on his estate'.¹¹

Nor does the government offer any support for men like John Barton. This is made clear when Barton goes to London as a trade union delegate. The entire demonstration turns into a debacle because Parliament refuses

to hear their petition. Barton's experience in London also turns into another example of the Dives-Lazarus parable. Here the haggard and hungry delegates are in vivid contrast to the fat horses and ornate carriages which impede their gathering. Barton's mistreatment by a London policeman is representative of the gross indifference the demonstrators met with:

'One o' th' police struck me. "Whatten business have you to do that?" said I. "'You're frightening them horses," says he, in his mincing way (for Londoners are mostly tongue-tied and can't say their a's and i's properly), "and it's our business to keep you from molesting the ladies and gentlemen going to her Majesty's drawing-room." "'And why are we to be molested," asked I, "going decently about our business, which is life and death to us, and many a little one clemming at home in Lancashire? Which business is of most consequence i' the sight o' God, think you', ou'n or them gran' ladies and gentleman as you think so much on?" 'But I might as well ha' held me peace, for he only laughed.'
(p.144)

One result of the great gaps between the rich and the poor and their failure to communicate properly with one another is a strike. Mrs. Gaskell chastises both sides and shows that the strike exacerbates the bad relations which already exist between classes. The strike causes workers to harden their position against the manufacturers as well as inciting them to quarrel among themselves. Communication between the classes ceases:

'So class distrusted class, and their want of mutual confidence wrought sorrow to both. The masters would not be bullied, and compelled to reveal why they felt it wisest and best to offer only such low wages; they would not be made to tell that they were even sacrificing capital to obtain a decisive victory over the continental manufacturers. And the workmen sat silent and stern with folded hands refusing to work for such pay. There was a strike in Manchester.' (pp.221-222)

Another result is Harry Carson's murder, a death which like that of Bessy Higgins in North and South serves as a warning to Mrs. Gaskell's middle class readers that the country had better be put in order before groups of men like John Barton and the other trade unionists pull the country down. A meeting is called soon after the strike between the manufacturers and the workers to see if any settlement can be reached. Instead of making concessions both sides remain immovable. The manufacturers are faulted particularly for their poor judgement in failing to treat the workers as their brothers. One employer says the workers are more like animals than men but it is Harry Carson's uncompromising demands and his jesting picture of one of the workers which best show their callous attitude. Unable to stand any more physical and personal humiliation, the workers decide to take matters into their own hands. A meeting is called, oaths are taken and it falls to John Barton to murder Henry Carson, a symbol of the workers' oppression and neglect. Carson's death thus eliminates the possibility of a bond between the manufacturers and the workers which Disraeli had suggested through the characters of Egremont and Sybil.

Matched against Barton's growing militancy is the humble resignation of many of the workers to their suffering. Mrs. Gaskell pays particular attention to the attitudes of the working class for a number of reasons. Firstly, she uses her compassionate portrayal of the poor to reinforce her argument about the need for greater communication and a more comprehensive social philosophy by showing that the poor are not the uneducated savages indicated by the accounts of Carlyle and Disraeli, but rather that the poor have the same potential as do middle class people. Mrs. Gaskell's plea for fairer treatment of the poor is different from Carlyle's who appeals to common bonds between humanity

in the example of the Irish widow from Past and Present. Her argument goes further and says that all classes have deep emotional, intellectual and spiritual bonds. The stress on class concord can be attributed to her Unitarianism. Secondly, Mrs. Gaskell's sympathetic descriptions of the poor arise from her wishes to dispel the ignorance and fear of the growing number of working class people who lay outside the boundaries of middle class institutions or the pale of the church. These fears were real among the upper classes, and gained strength when the national religious census of 1851 revealed that at least a third of the country did not attend church and that the trend was accentuated in the large northern industrial cities. Mrs. Gaskell therefore wrote her novels to establish further that the city poor were not a 'degenerated race' as Engels commented but were rather a group of individuals who possessed a life, religion and culture.

The humane side to the poor is in fact one of the very first impressions which meets the reader's eye in Mary Barton. When the novel opens the Bartons and the Wilsons, two working class families, are out for a walk in the fields outside Manchester enjoying the restorative powers of the countryside. To the reader this is an immediate signal that the workers are capable of amusements other than those provided by sex and alcohol, the two sources of pleasure Engels notices as prominent among the working classes. The fact that the workers actually enjoy their lives is amply demonstrated when these two families return to the Bartons' home, a well furnished dwelling. More than anything else this episode shows that factory workers are capable of developing tastes in their selection of furniture and food. Gaskell's account of a weaver's dwelling is exactly the opposite to Disraeli's in Sybil which latter

seems nothing more than a sketch from a Commission Report. Where Mrs. Gaskell's description highlights the Bartons' attention to crockery, curtains and flowers; Disraeli's is limited to the bare essentials of an iron kettle 'some candles, a few lucifer matches, two tin mugs, a paper of salt, and an iron spoon'.¹²

Other working class scenes reveal that the poor are often better educated than their social betters. Mrs. Gaskell introduces the unknown class of weavers in Manchester who have educated themselves. In their spare time they read Newton's Principia and Linnaeus's botanical works, a contrast to Carson's son who spends his free time trying to seduce working class women.¹³ In so doing Mrs. Gaskell establishes that the workers are not merely 'hands' whose lives are consumed by work, but on the contrary are men who are keenly interested in the larger world. In Job Legh Mrs. Gaskell presents a most fascinating individual. His vast library and his collection of animals are a testimony to the depth of his interest in the natural sciences. Moreover he is also a great story-teller and his accounts of the journey of the 'babby' and the description of his friend wearing a nightcap to try to stop the baby from crying reveal both a tender and humourous side to the poor. The same can be said for the story about the scorpion which Margaret tells, or Jem Wilson's sea tales.

Mary Barton further shows that the poor possess a valuable set of traditions. In some cases workers have brought country customs with them into the city and it is obvious from Mrs. Gaskell's accounts that these give the labourers pleasure. Alice the washerwoman bakes Cumberland bread and also collects spices to make herbal products. Others like Margaret, Job Legh's blind granddaughter, sing ballads. Her Lancashire ballad 'The Oldham Weaver' tells the sad tale of a

weaver who loses his loom and furniture due to poor trade. Kingsley also used working class ditties with equal success as is shown in Tregarva the gamekeeper's 'A Rough Rhyme On A Rough Matter' in Yeast. These realistic aspects allowed both novels to give a more vivid picture of the poor.

Mary Barton also shows that the working classes have a vital religion which is in contrast to the rich who have little to do with religion at all in this novel. Much of Mary Barton compares the helpful nature of the workers with the calculated greed of the manufacturers. Mrs. Gaskell knew many of the workers' good deeds went unnoticed and like a modern Dante she records the workers' noble spirit as it is forged through suffering. Besides Barton's 'errand of mercy' cited earlier, there are many other examples to choose from. The most impressive aspect is the workers' generosity to one another in the midst of suffering. Consider Alice the washerwoman. Though she is exhausted by her daily work she always finds time to help others. Margaret, Job Legh's granddaughter, does not allow her own infirmities to interfere with helping the Bartons. Another example is Mary who is equally willing to lend a hand to diminish suffering and she looks after strangers as well as nurses her ailing father. A further instance of active religion occurs when Mary hurries to Liverpool and when in trouble is helped by the boatman Sturgis and his wife. Their generosity recalls the benevolent actions of another seafaring character, Dickens's Captain Cuttle in Dombey and Son. Repeatedly Mary Barton verifies the account of one contemporary who said 'the poor give more to each other than the rich give to the poor'.¹⁴ By emphasising the humanity of the poor and by showing the workers to be intelligent and to possess qualities normally only associated with the best of the middle classes,

Mrs. Gaskell places herself at odds with the traditional understanding of the working class. Mary Barton just as North and South was also to do, shows that the real tragedy of the poor is that although intelligent and hard working, their poverty forces them to live demeaning lives.

The ending of the novel marks a final effort on the novelist's behalf to underline the importance of the 'gentle humanities' which link all men to one another, the foundation upon which Mrs. Gaskell places her hopes of social stability. In a conclusion deliberately rich in religious imagery, Mrs. Gaskell tries to show that men are further bound to one another by suffering. By placing the social conflict in religious terms, in terms of the Dives-Lazarus parable, Mrs. Gaskell hopes to bring the different classes together. After the trial scene where Jem Wilson is cleared of the murder charge against him, John Barton calls a meeting with Wilson and Carson to confess that he is the one who has killed Carson's son. The scene is a tense one as all the key characters in the novel are present. It is only now on his deathbed that John Barton recognises the severity of the deed he has committed and up until this point abstracted through political clichés. On his deathbed Barton realises that the man before him is no longer the 'enemy', a manufacturer, but only a man like himself. In Carson's quivering voice and passion for revenge Barton recalls similar feelings he felt years earlier when his son Tom died of starvation. This realisation magnifies the horror of Barton's crime and now Barton understands he has killed a 'brother' of the human race. This is the same kind of discovery which occurs in Dickens's Great Expectations, as Pip instead of leaving the side of his benefactor, at length holds his hand as Magwitch waits in the dock.

The novel closes with a flourish of religious symbolism when the converted Carson forgives Barton for killing his son. The images of Christ's reconciliation are evoked and applied to the two nations. The theme of class forgiveness however represents only one part of the book's conclusion. The new understanding between master and worker occurs when Carson invites Job Legh and Jem Wilson to discuss 'the circumstances and feelings' causing his son's death. It is a significant development in the novel because the meaningful dialogue between Carson and the others shows the unnecessary pain which could have been avoided had such communication existed earlier. The discussion between Carson, Legh and Wilson pinpoints the wide difference in thinking which exists between master and men. Carson sticks rigidly to the laws of political economy while the workers contend that other factors must be taken into account. The juxtaposition of these two views resembles scenes Dickens uses between Gradgrind and Sleary in Hard Times. Here too in Mary Barton the 'facts' of classical economics are shown to be inadequate as a social theory. Through Job Legh Mrs. Gaskell launches her most impressive attack on the cash-nexus system:

'You can never work facts as you would fixed quantities, and say, given two facts, and the product is so and so. God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are for ever changing, and uncertain. God has also made some weak; not in any one way but in all. One is weak in body, another in mind, another in steadiness of purpose, a fourth can't tell right from wrong, and so on; or if he can tell the right, he wants strength to hold by it. Now to my thinking, them that is strong in any of God's gifts is meant to help the weak, - be hanged to the facts!' (p.457)

Never having understood the workers before Carson now moves to correct his thinking and he develops a new social philosophy which advocates a greater interest in all social classes. The wish of his heart,

to make more money, 'now becomes a desire to forge 'a perfect understanding' between 'masters and men'. The new recognition of mutual interests between classes is further demonstrated by Duncombe the millowner who arranges work abroad for Mary and Jem in Canada. This closing theme of emigration reveals the extent of Carlyle's influence upon Mrs. Gaskell's work. The willingness of the manufacturers to make things better both at home and overseas is representative of their new outlook.

Mary Barton is a powerful novel because the main action centres around working class characters. Perhaps more important is the sympathetic rendition of the 'two nations' problem through the eyes of a working man. It was for this reason especially that Carlyle hailed the novel as one of the few works making 'a real contribution ... towards developing a huge subject'.¹⁵ Mary Barton focuses on reformed manufacturers at the end of the novel and is an indication of the themes she was to explore in her other social novel, North and South.

North and South

North and South (1855) contained the second part of Mrs. Gaskell's social argument. At first sight North and South looks like an apology to the manufacturers she had offended in Mary Barton through the figure of Carson the millowner. Her first novel had in fact caused a stir among reviewers and the Guardian attacked her for 'maligning' the manufacturers. Ironically Mrs. Gaskell had a high regard for manufacturers and saw millowners in moral terms similar to those of Carlyle and Disraeli. She once wrote that she could 'not imagine a nobler scope for a thoughtful energetic man, desirous of doing good to his kind, than that presented to his powers as the master of a factory'.¹⁶ Such praise

could also be applied to Carlyle's working aristocracy, Disraeli's Millbank or Dickens's ironmaster, George Rouncewell. The novel was originally called Margaret Hale but the title was changed as the novel appeared in Charles Dickens's Household Words and was subject to his editing. Dickens changed the title to North and South because he correctly felt the novel was a much broader work in that it was about two contrasting cultures. Furthermore North and South followed the editor's own Hard Times and these novels adequately demonstrated the different ways the two authors addressed social problems. In Hard Times Dickens vigorously attacked the theory of Utilitarianism when he tried to establish its incoherence. North and South was more of a compromise which sought to improve existing institutions. The six year gap between this and Mary Barton had deepened Mrs. Gaskell's social consciousness. A deeper social knowledge resulted from her friendships with the inventor James Nasmyth and the philanthropist James Kay-Shuttleworth. North and South was Mrs. Gaskell's fourth novel and here she portrayed the feud between 'two nations' on wider terms than Disraeli's rich-poor contrast in Sybil. Here she presents a clash between the agricultural south and the industrial north. In this respect North and South further explored the 'grinding collision' between the old and new worlds which Carlyle outlined in his pamphlet 'Signs of the Times' a quarter of a century earlier.

North and South is a novel which optimistically argues for a more humane industrialism, an end the novelist achieves by blending northern industry with southern manners. By offering a solution which meshes the rural and industrial traditions, Mrs. Gaskell follows in the footsteps of Carlyle's Past and Present and Disraeli's Sybil. Mrs. Gaskell's accounts however are unique because she prefers the modern industrial age and

finds vitality in the manufacturing centres whereas these former writers look romantically back to the monastic communities of the past. One of the distinguishing features of the novel is that the industrial north is perceived as creating a new society with a new set of relationships between individuals which is preferred to fashionable London, the rural beauty of Helstone, and even the learning of Oxford.

The North-South problem is portrayed by two families; the Thorntons, who are the leading industrialists of Milton, and the Hales, a typical southern family. The novel's emphasis on the upper and middle classes is a complete shift in focus from Mary Barton. In the growing relationship between John Thornton and Margaret Hale and in their eventual marriage, Mrs. Gaskell shows the various ingredients which are required if the nation wishes to solve the social and industrial problems.

The novel begins in the south and works northward. Mrs. Gaskell is able to display the best and worst aspects of rural and industrial Britain. The Hales and their daughter Margaret represent the values of pre-industrial England. They live in the small country village of Helstone, a picturesque place likened to something out of Tennyson's poetry. Margaret's parents' marriage embodies some of the best English traditions. Her father, Mr. Hale, is a learned clergyman from Oxford who like the typical country parson spends the bulk of his time visiting his parishioners during the day and reading theology in the evenings. Mrs. Hale has aristocratic links and comes from one of the best London families and has even kept her favourite maid to attend her every need. Here in the country Margaret lives a storybook life. She enjoys the pleasures of sketching, walking, and listening to the rhythm of the falling rain. In her carefree world she often accompanies her father

on his visits and knows several of the cottage dwellers. Among the trees, green fields and blue skies Margaret lives in what seems to her a perfect existence. In Helstone:

'The forest trees were all one dark, full, dusky green; the fern below them caught all the slanting sunbeams; the weather sultry and broodingly still. Margaret used to tramp along by her father's side, crushing down the fern with a cruel glee, as she felt it yield under her light foot, and send up the fragrance peculiar to it, - out on the broad commons into the warm scented light, seeing multitudes of wild, free, living creatures, revelling in the sunshine, and the herbs and flowers it called forth.'¹⁷

Margaret's social attitudes are moulded by her social background. Her father as a clergyman holds an office which entitles him to the respect of the community and their relationships towards their parishioners and the poor in the countryside are marked by paternalism. As country gentry the Hales have a contempt for trading and manufacturing centres which is demonstrated when Margaret says: 'I don't like sloppy people. I think we are far better off, knowing only cottages and labourers, and people without pretence.' (p.50)

The truth is that Margaret's idyllic picture of rural life is far from complete. Helstone is also a stifling and dreary place which strangles all vital intellectual and emotional energy. In the character of Margaret Hale Mrs. Gaskell wishes to perform the same task as Disraeli with Egremont in Sybil and Kingsley with Lancelot in Yeast, where these characters learn that the real conditions of the countryside are very different from the traditional middle class picture. Margaret's perceptions of village life are after all only those of a child and she lives in a carefree world which corresponds to the relics of rural life which cloud the minds of Egremont and Lancelot. The damp

climate in Helstone recalls similar points Dickens makes in Bleak House in reference to the oppressive Dedlock estate in Leicestershire where the rain falls incessantly. Likewise the Hales' marriage has grown as stale as the Dedlocks' in the heavy southern air. The slowness of southern life allows Mrs. Hale to contrast her lot with that of her fashionable sister who lives in luxury in London. But London, as the novel shows, isn't much better than Helstone; for the most part it is portrayed as hollow and pretentious. There for example marriages have more to do with convention and property than with love and romance. Nevertheless Mrs. Hale is a manic complainer and the damp air causes her aristocratic head to ache. Nor does the traditional south prove to be efficacious to Mr. Hale's clerical career. His small agricultural parish provides little intellectual or spiritual stimulation and the constant isolation has a numbing effect on his own spirituality. Doubts develop and he resigns his office and seeks employment as a tutor in Milton, a northern town.

The Hales' trip to the north marks a significant point in the novel. By arranging the novel in this way, Mrs. Gaskell captures their first impression of the city, which further conveys the radical differences between rural and urban life. The Hales' sense of strangeness when entering the north must have paralleled the feelings many southern workers had when economic factors forced them into industrial areas. The movement to an environment governed by the laws of production instead of the seasonal changes is a jarring one. The Hales' introduction to city life is a harsh one and their southern sensibilities are particularly keen to notice the dark polluted skies which can be seen and tasted for miles, the 'long, straight, hopeless streets' and the haggard look of the labourers. Like Dickens's Coketown, Milton is a famous

industrial town where production never ceases:

'Meanwhile at Milton the chimney smoked, the ceaseless roar and mighty beat and dazzling whirl of machinery struggled and strove perpetually. Senseless and purposeless were wood and iron and steam in their endless labours. (p.510)

The chief representative of the north is the manufacturer John Thornton. His energy and ambition, which personify the industrial north, are in marked contrast to the unhurried ways of the south. Thornton is undoubtedly the most favourable picture of a manufacturer in the novels under consideration, and he is neither a braggart like Bounderby in Hard Times nor a brute like Bishop Hatton from Sybil. Margaret's first impressions of Thornton are telling ones because they contrast vividly with her southern manners. She comments that Thornton looks like a person 'who would enjoy battling every adverse thing he could meet with - enemies, winds or circumstances' and this is an accurate summary of his life. Contrary to Margaret's placid country settling, Thornton has raised himself out of poverty by sheer determination and effort. For years he supported his mother and sister on the meagre salary of fifteen shillings a week and these early experiences have moulded him into a hard man of trade. So closely does he associate his life with the manufacturing system that he lives next door to the factory he owns. Thornton is in every sense of the word a self-made man. Like the real world industrial giants of the nineteenth century, Thornton champions a free market and disdains all parliamentary interference. Like the typical successful manufacturer, Thornton has a peculiar reverence for the system which has enabled him to advance:

'It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and

behaviour; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not be always as a master, but as an over-looker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order.' (p.125)¹⁸

Such independence in Thornton and Milton is perceived as both a good and bad thing. The Hales for example soon warm to the new patterns of life in the city. Mr. Hale becomes fascinated by the sheer power of the manufacturing system. Margaret too comes to realise that Milton life is far more democratic than Helstone's was and learns that the workers possess a greater sense of freedom than did the meek cottage dwellers in the Helstone forest. She is surprised at the impulsiveness of the factory workers and the inquisitiveness of the Milton girls who enquire about her clothes. Dixon the maid pinpoints the new set of rules which exist in Milton when she says: 'Why master and you must always be asking the lower classes upstairs, since we came to Milton, I cannot understand. Folk at Helstone were never brought higher than the kitchen.'

Milton life, although far more exuberant than Helstone, is not perfect. The negative side to this independence is that manufacturers use the claim of non-interference in their workers' lives to justify their indifference to social problems. Thornton's self-congratulatory claim never to interfere with his workers when they are away from the factory is an excuse for indifference to the welfare of his workers. This soon becomes evident when the novel shows that Thornton and other manufacturers in Milton operate under a cash-nexus philosophy which is totally lacking in benevolence and social concern. This is an important disclosure because it is precisely this area which Margaret's southern paternalism eventually helps to modify. Thornton has forgotten

his other social responsibilities in his concern for factory affairs. He coldly dismisses human suffering, of which there is much in Milton, with Malthusian theory, saying it is only the consequence of 'dishonestly enjoyed pleasure'. He views the workers with suspicion and speaks of them in terms reminiscent of Bounderby's turtle soup, venison and gold spoon:

'... they want to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground. They are always trying at it; they always have it in their minds; and every five or six years, there comes a struggle between masters and men.' (p.162)

The worst demonstration of Thornton's disregard for his workers is his refusal to inform his workers about the reasons behind the reduction in wages and furthermore to explain the international state of trade. Thornton embraces Ricardo's 'iron law of wages' and feels that he can act with certainty. Mrs. Gaskell condemns this high-handedness and shows how it results in the workers feeling treated like pawns. Towards the threatened strike in Milton, Thornton takes a despotic position which sounds like something out of the pages of Carlyle's Latter Day Pamphlets. 'Rose water surgery won't do for them. Cromwell would have made a capital millowner ... I wish we had him to put down this strike for us.'

It is Margaret who brings about resolution in North and South. Through Margaret Hale Mrs. Gaskell offers a message of individual charity and reform. The emphasis on a practical religion is a reiteration of much of Mary Barton but North and South shows far more clearly what can be done by individual responses to poverty. The novel traces how Margaret's religious ideas and attitudes change as she and her family move from Helstone to Milton. The paternalism which she applied to

'her people' in Helstone simply does not work in Milton nor would the workers tolerate the deferential attitude expected of them. Mrs. Gaskell shows in North and South how the different social structure of the city necessitates a more active religious response than the country. Her observations place her in agreement with Carlyle who asserts that the new social conditions of the present demand a new type of leadership. Margaret's religious flexibility is in contrast to the behaviour of her father who is unable to square his religious beliefs to either the country or the city, where the range of experiences are outside the scope of his academic world. Mrs. Gaskell purposely criticises Hale's cerebral theology by showing its inability to cope with either economic or human affairs.

It is Margaret's southern orthodox attitudes which are the first to challenge Thornton's rugged view of individualism. His advocacy of both a 'wise despotism' and the workers' freedom is inconsistent, and revealed as only a screen for 'laissez-faire'. All the social novelists rejected the leave-alone economic philosophy and Mrs. Gaskell's refutation takes a religious form which emphasises the connection between all individuals and classes:

'God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless. Neither you nor any other master can help yourselves. The most proudly independent man depends on those around him for their insensible influence on his character - his life.' (p.169)

All social classes are included in Margaret's dealings in Milton and it is her radical Christianity which breaks down the walls of hostility and eases the social inequalities between masters and men. The

existence of the two nations, one rich and secure, the other poor and uncertain, is made plain by Margaret's introduction to working class life. These episodes are similar to those previously discussed in Mary Barton but it must be added that the details Mrs. Gaskell provides here seem to be more for the sake of instructing her middle class readership rather than for examining the nature of working class consciousness as she had done so effectively with John Barton.

One day Margaret is walking with her father in some outlying fields near the city when she meets a labouring man and his daughter. The contrast in dress, language and manners is an embodiment of Disraeli's 'two nations' pronouncement. It becomes clear that a different set of manners exists between them. The gregariousness of the south typified by Margaret's wish to 'come and see you' is met with the cold suspecting north's 'Whatten yo asking for?' The culture barrier is shown again by their different accents. Higgins calls Margaret a 'foreigner' while she sees the two as 'neighbours'. Even on this brief walk the difference between both worlds is noticed. While the Hales continue their walk, the Higgins' lives remain regulated by the whistle of the mill which soon beckons them back to work. Margaret's friendship with the Higgins is used as a literary device and in this way the lives of the poor are investigated. Mrs. Gaskell uses Bessy Higgins to explore factory hardship and her father Nicholas to explain the reasons why workers enlist in trade unions, and the rest of this section discusses the author's observations.

Margaret's first visit to the Higgins' home is a memorable one. Like that of the Davenports in Mary Barton, the house is back among the 'squalid streets' and their home is filled with only bare essentials. The interior is dirty and smoky and it is a place without colour or

comfort. Here the reader hears the story of Bessy Higgins, a girl who has spent her entire life in the factory. The fact that she is the same age as Margaret heightens the implicit contrast between the two nations. She has been chained to the factory just as Kingsley's Alton Locke has been imprisoned in the city. Like the young Alton she has never seen a forest or heard the wind blow. Bessy is a sickly girl whose long labour in the cotton mills has given her byssinosis, a respiratory disease caused by her inhaling the cotton fibres which fly off the machines. Battered and weakened by her disease Bessy resigns herself to dying. In an informative passage Bessy gives a history of her life, a history many workers would have felt described the Industrial Revolution:

'If yo'd led the life I have, and gotten as weary of it as I have, and thought at times, "maybe it'll last for fifty or sixty years - it does wi' some," - and got dizzy, and dazed, and sick, as each of them sixty years seemed to spin about me, and mock me with its length of hours and minutes, and endless bits o' time - oh, wench! I tell thee thou'd been glad enough when th'doctor said he feared thou'd never see another winter.' (p.131)

On further visits Bessy divulges further information about her life in the factory. One of the most touching scenes in the book occurs when both these girls talk about their youths. We learn that Bessy has never had the expensive clothes which Margaret wears but only the strips of material which cover her body. Religion is important to Bessy because it helps her to tolerate her mundane existence. Her religion is entirely otherworldly, in a different way from that of Mr. Hales's, and the passages she quotes from the bible always have an apocalyptic tone. As could be expected her favourite book in the bible is Revelations which describes the promise of a better life to come. Bessy sees her fate in a religious light and in terms of the Dives-

Lazarus parable. She says to Margaret: 'Some's pre-elected to sumptuous feasts, and purple and fine linen, - may be you're one on' em. Others toil and moil all their lives long - and the very dogs are not pitiful in our days as they were in the days of Lazarus.' Bessy's history is not only informative, it also serves as a warning, as did Carson's death in Mary Barton. The harshness of her life is not to be dismissed lightly. The average life expectancy of the factory operative in Manchester was seventeen years, less than half the life expectancy of the gentry. The frustration and anger which Bessy feels are the same forces that motivated Barton to kill Carson, but Bessy is too weak to attempt murder:

'And I think, if this should be th'end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet - and wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air yo' speak on - any my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and o' all my troubles - I think if this life is the'end, and there's no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes - yo' wench, yo'!' said she, sitting up, and clutching violently, almost fiercely, at Margaret's hand, 'I could go mad and kill yo', I could.' (p.145)

North and South also discusses the nature of unions. Mrs. Gaskell's negative description rivals Dickens's accounts from Hard Times where Stephen Blackpool as an individual is juxtaposed against the union led by the doctrinaire Slackbridge. But in North and South the accounts are not totally one-sided and efforts are made to explain why it is that workers join unions in the first place. The following passage is one of the most remarkable in all the social novels for its ability to present the workers' side of the case:

'And it's th' masters as has made us sin, if th' Union is a sin. Not this generation maybe, but their fathers. Their fathers ground our fathers to the very dust; ground us to powder! ... In those days of sore oppression th' Unions began; it were a necessity. It's a necessity now, according to me. It's a withstanding of injustice, past, present, or to come. It may be like war; along wi' it comes crimes; but I think it were a greater crime to let it alone. Our only chance is binding together in one common interest; and if some are cowards and some are fools, they mun come along and join the great march, whose only strength is in numbers.' (p.296)

This however is the closest one gets to the structure of working class thought for Mrs. Gaskell like Dickens sees unions as selfish forces which apply the same regimented spirit which is used on the factory floors. Like Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell always favours the individual over the group and this is certainly true regarding Nicholas Higgins, Bessy's father. In Higgins Mrs. Gaskell shows how the unions cause more harm than good. He is both a union leader and rugged factory hand known for his diligent work. Membership of the union has been at great personal cost for Higgins and his life is very nearly ruined because of the immovable union will. His family suffers. The support Higgins gives to several strikes and the resulting hardship have caused the death of his wife and daughter. Whereas John Barton turns to opium to escape his harsh existence, Higgins relies on alcohol and his drunken fits cause him to mistreat his two daughters. Once intelligent and a free thinker, Higgins now bends his will to the union mentality.

The unions do further harm by widening the rift between social classes and isolating the workers from one another. On one occasion Thornton is called a 'bulldog' and later a man as 'slick and cunning' as a cat. But surely the most startling aspect of the union is the way union men ostracise other workers who themselves are not union members:

'Well. If a man doesn't belong to th' Union, them as works next looms has orders not to speak to him - if he's sorry or ill it's a' the same; he's out o' bounds; he's none o' us; he comes among us, he works among us, but he's none o' us. I' some places them's fined who speaks to him. Yo' try that, miss; try living a year or two among them as looks away if yo' look at 'em; try working within two yards o' crowds o' men, who, yo' know, have a grinding grudge at yo' in their hearts - to whom if yo' say yo're glad, not an eye brightens, nor a lip moves, - to whom if your heart's heavy, yo' can never say nought, because they'll ne'er take notice on your sighs or sad looks (and a man's no man who'll groan out loud 'bout folk asking him what's the matter?) - Just yo' try that, miss - ten hours for three hundred days, and yo'll know a bit what th' Union is.'

(pp.295-296)

The tension between the individual and the union is further explored in the case of Boucher the factory worker. Mrs. Gaskell shows how Boucher, like Dickens's Stephen Blackpool, is caught in the dilemma between obeying the decrees of the union and remaining responsible to himself and his family. Boucher finally decides to leave the striking ranks because of his family's growing distress. Tragically he cannot find employment elsewhere because his previous union membership blacklists him. His futile efforts to find work cause him and others to lead a strike against Thornton's mill with the vain hope of forcing the manufacturer's hand. Worse still, having left the union, Boucher is considered a blackleg and he receives no union help. Cut off from his friends and the hope of employment Boucher kills himself to escape the social degradation and ostracism. Boucher, like Blackpool, is a victim of industrial dispute for both men die because of social isolation. Blackpool's death as a result of his fall into an abandoned coal mine is symbolic of his social isolation. Boucher's death is the more horrible because he drowns himself in the polluted waters near the factory where he used to work. His 'distorted, agonized face' is partially

stained from the dye in the water and this is a gross but accurate image of a man who becomes part of the refuse which is emitted from the factories. Both he and Bessy Higgins are casualties who die as a result of the inhuman competition and the way the factories used the men.

The social isolation between the manufacturers and the workers fits into Mrs. Gaskell's overall theme of the loss of communication between both classes. Accordingly Mrs. Gaskell shows through Higgins' discussions with the Hales and with Thornton himself that a greater trust between classes is possible. After Bessy's death and the failed strike, Nicholas makes his way to the Hales' home. In the course of their conversation Higgins voices his anger towards the manufacturers who he feels are more concerned with making money than in caring for the workers. Largely through Margaret's efforts Higgins is persuaded to go and talk to Thornton and to ask for work. Higgins is at first refused employment because of his prior union ties but Thornton soon relents after he sees that Higgins is wanting to work on behalf of the Boucher family. When Thornton visits the Bouchers it marks a significant point in the novel and is the first time Thornton has anything to do with the workers outside the factory, something he once swore he would never do. Thornton's awakened social conscience, of which this is the first instance, has been the result of his relationship with Margaret. Ever since the strike where Margaret forced Thornton to treat the strikers as men he has begun to take interest in things other than his own factory. By talking to Higgins he learns the real condition of the poor. More importantly he starts to ask his workers for their advice and opinions. The new employer-employee relationship has other ramifications. Seeing the bad food that one working family eats,

Thornton decides to build a dining hall which the workers maintain for their own benefit. One act of charity leads to another and Thornton is often asked to dine with the workers which 'further encourages a better understanding. For the first time he begins to understand their strange dialects and even comes to appreciate their sense of humour. The unity between master and men, as at Trafford's mill in Sybil, is a perfect model of the new pattern for future factory relations. 'Such intercourse' we are told, 'is the very breath of life.' Thornton's new popularity with the workers brings further rewards when foreign competition closes his mills and several of his workers say they'd like to work for him again if his factory ever re-opens.

The free trade system for which Manchester was famous must be moderated even further. Thornton loses his mill just as Carson loses his son for the sake of emphasising Mrs. Gaskell's theme of a new humane type of capitalism which benefits all classes and not just one. All this time Margaret's work in the city allows her to gain a mature view of the past and accordingly she gives up her memories of country life. This painful transition is finally brought home when she visits Helstone after her father's death with Mr. Bell, a tutor from Oxford, and finds her country home entirely altered by time and improvements. Margaret understands she can never return and she now devotes her life to the city.

The novel concludes by offering a hopeful solution. Margaret inherits Mr. Bell's legacy, a legacy which includes the very land Thornton's factory is built on. Now as rich and independent as Thornton used to be, she is in a position to offer Thornton the money he needs to open his factory again. The important element in the conclusion is the exchange of roles for it is now Margaret who is in a superior financial

position to Thornton. Margaret's southern ways will in the future guide Thornton's capitalism. The dynamic industry of northern life is preferred over the south but on the other hand the vital religious energy of the south is the very element which can ameliorate the human squalor in Milton. This is indeed hopeful and takes from the best of both traditions of north and south.

Conclusion

Mary Barton and North and South both emphasised the need for communication between the rich and the poor. Mrs. Gaskell believed that an increased understanding between the 'two worlds' would end class conflict. She centred her solution on those she knew best; the manufacturers and the workers. By placing 'the condition of England' question in the lives of individuals, Mrs. Gaskell was able on the one hand to dispel middle class fears regarding the workers, and secondly, to urge an active message of Christian reform which would redress all social problems. In stressing the uniqueness and goodness of every individual, Mrs. Gaskell's novels were by far the most optimistic. She hoped her novels would help to minimise class confrontations and to forge greater social bonds. Unquestionably Mrs. Gaskell's most distinguishing feature as a social novelist was her ability to discuss the poor with whom she felt at one. Her realistic working class portrayals placed her in widest contrast to Disraeli. Mrs. Gaskell could describe the poor with fidelity because she lived and worked among them. Of the social novelists, it was Mrs. Gaskell whose feelings for the poor went deeper than mere sympathy. Disraeli on the other hand knew little of the poor but described the aristocracy, the part of society he knew best, with equal precision and passion. The difference between both

writers is clear; where Mrs. Gaskell listened to the agony of the poor, Disraeli wrote gossip about the aristocracy to the Queen.

Charles Kingsley and Mrs. Gaskell were both drawn to write because of religion and in both cases religious belief shaped the novels they wrote. Kingsley however approached the problem of the 'two nations' from a different social and religious vantage point. Therefore for the sake of comparison Charles Kingsley's social novels will be studied in the next chapter.

Footnotes to Chapter Four

1. G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England, Methuen and Co., 1962 and reprinted in 1977, p.176.
2. Coral Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell The Novel of Social Crisis, Paul Elek, 1975, pp.14-15.
3. Monica Correa Fryckstedt, 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton and Ruth : A Challenge to Christian England', Uppsala, 1982, Almqvist and Wiksell International, pp.77-78.
4. Winifred Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell A Biography, Oxford, 1976, pp.139-140.
5. Reprinted in Peter Keating, introduction to Cranford/Cousin Phillis, Harmondsworth, 1976, p.7. Dickens wrote to Mrs. Gaskell in 1850 saying 'as I do honestly know there is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of Mary Barton. I venture to ask whether you can give me any hope that you will write a short tale, or any number of tales, for the projected pages.'
6. Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities, Harmondsworth, 1963 and reprinted in 1982, p.101.
7. For more on the differences between Engels and Mrs. Gaskell's understanding of Manchester consult John Lucas's The Literature of Change, The Harvester Press, 1977. See Chapter Two 'Engels, Mrs. Gaskell and Manchester'.
8. Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism', Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, p.155.
9. Briggs, p.107.
10. Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton (1848), Harmondsworth, 1970, p.45. All references to this edition.
11. Fryckstedt, p.25.
12. Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil, p.150.
13. E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (editors), The Unknown Mayhew, Harmondsworth, 1984, p.124. Henry Mayhew makes a similar assertion although he says the worsening economic position of the weavers and longer working hours have resulted in a decrease 'in refinement and intellect' among them. Of the Silk-Weavers he writes: 'The weavers were, formerly, almost the only botanists in the metropolis, and their love of flowers to this day is a strongly marked characteristic of the class. Some years back, we are told, they passed their leisure hours, and generally the whole family dined on Sundays, at the little gardens in the environs of London, now mostly built upon. Not very long ago

there was an Entomological Society, and they were among the most diligent entomologists, in the kingdom. This taste, though far less general than formerly, still continues to be a type of the class. There was at one time a Floricultural Society, an Historical Society, and a Mathematical Society, all maintained by the operative silk-weavers; and the celebrated Dollond, the inventor of the achromatic telescope, was a weaver; so too were Simpson and Edwards, the mathematicians, before they were taken from the loom into the employ of Government, to teach mathematics to the cadets at Woolwich and Chatham.'

14. Briggs, p.114.
15. Gérin, p.89.
16. Fryckstedt, p.27.
17. Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South (1855), Harmondsworth, 1972, p.48. All references to this edition.
18. Thornton's championing of the system proved to be accurate historically : which is one reason why Britain never had the revolutionary proletariat Marx and Engels anticipated.

Chapter Five

Charles Kingsley and Christian Socialism

The third novelist examined in this survey, Charles Kingsley, was a man of tremendous talent and energy. Neglected today, Kingsley was one of the leading religious figures of his time and occupied a position of national importance because of his efforts to bring Christianity, education and sanitation to all classes. Inquisitive and compassionate, Kingsley's long ministry of over thirty years at Eversley, a village in Hampshire, enabled him to have an understanding of rural poverty few could rival. His social criticism and sensitive portrayal of the poor mark a further contribution to the 'condition of England' question.

Early Experiences

Charles Kingsley was born at Holne Vicarage, Devon, on the 12th of June, 1819, the same year as fellow novelist George Eliot. He was the oldest and the most famous of six children. He had the advantage of belonging to a literary family and two of his brothers, Henry and George, and his only sister, Charlotte, were also successful writers. His parents provided a good atmosphere at home for moral and emotional development. His father, the Reverend Charles Kingsley, was a cultivated and widely read man who had studied at Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge. His mother, Mary Lucas, was the daughter of a judge in Barbados and of poetic temperament. When pregnant with Charles she took daily walks on the moors to communicate the beauty of the West Country to her unborn son. Together these two elements of intellect and feeling helped form the man Charles Kingsley.

Kingsley had a precocious childhood. At the age of four he gave his parents a glimpse of what lay in store for their oldest son when he began writing poetry and delivering sermons for his own entertainment. His early education rested fully with his father who steered his bright son towards the study of the classics. The family moved to Clovelly in 1830 and Charles quickly fell in love with the Devon countryside. These days were some of his happiest and he recalled them with Wordsworthian fondness saying his 'boyhood was fed' with 'the semi-sensual delights of the ear and eye, from sun and stars, wood and wave, the beautiful inanimate in all its forms'.¹ Clovelly was a fishing town and he soon grew to admire the agility and skill of the local fishermen and these stalwart characters became a prototype for his later literary heroes. At the age of eleven Charles was sent to a small preparatory school in Bristol, and while there he witnessed the riots in the autumn of 1831 which followed the rejection of the Reform Bill by the House of Lords. This first-hand experience of social unrest left a lasting impression on the boy and explains, if only in part, his later desire for social justice.² In 1832 he was sent to Helstone Grammar School in Devon, where he studied under the son of the poet Coleridge. Here he began to read voraciously and was encouraged to write poetry. He spent two years studying classics at King's College, London, when his father was made vicar in Chelsea, and then in 1838 went up to Cambridge University, where he had won a scholarship to Magdalene College. His university career was sporadic and he looked back on his college years as 'very sinful'.³ Religious and personal doubts nearly caused him to leave Cambridge altogether. However, during his final year at Cambridge he met and immediately fell in love with the woman he was to marry, Fanny Grenfell. Kingsley liked to say the first day they met was their true wedding day, and their marriage in 1844 may

have been the single most important event in their lives. The marriage saved Charles from a sensual life and Fanny from entering a woman's religious order founded by one of the Oxford churchmen, Edmund Pusey. In Fanny, Kingsley found a woman who both loved and inspired him. During their engagement she sent him the works of several transcendental thinkers in an effort to soothe his searching nature and these writers exercised a powerful influence over him. Carlyle's The French Revolution (1837) pointed out the cause of poor leadership. Coleridge's Aids to Reflection (1824) argued the Christian faith to be the highest perfection of human intelligence. F. D. Maurice's The Kingdom of Christ (1842) gave expression to questions already fermenting in Kingsley's mind. Taken together these writers shook Kingsley from his dogmatic slumbers and by the time he had finished his degree, he was a new man full of enthusiasm. He received a first class degree in classics and a second class degree in mathematics in 1842. In the same year he decided to become a priest.

Rector

Kingsley became rector of Eversley in 1844 and remained there until his death over thirty years later. He inherited a sleepy parish but quickly turned his church into a centre of bustling activity. The accounts of these changes in his widow's Charles Kingsley His Letters and Memories of his Life (1876) paint a picture of a priest recalling George Herbert's The Country Parson. Kingsley was a model clergyman who was concerned with the physical, spiritual and social well being of his parish. Though advised against it by his bishop, Kingsley preached in a simple language his uninstructed parishioners could understand. His disarming personality and genuine concern made him especially

popular with the many agricultural workers in his parish. He paid special attention to the poorest in his parish and sought to improve their living conditions. He helped drain low areas in the land in an effort to curtail sickness. Indeed his concern for the poor often took dramatic form : on one occasion when visiting a sick parishioner he bored a hole in the wall to improve ventilation. Kingsley was also especially fond of children and for their sakes founded the village school in Eversley in 1853. In addition to these responsibilities was a hectic daily schedule:

'Up at five, to see a dying man; ought to have been up at two, but Ben King, the rat-catcher, who came to call me, was taken nervous; was from 5.30 to 6.30 with the most dreadful case of agony. Came home, got a wash and a pipe, and again to him at eight - dying of pressure of the brain, going any moment. Prayed the commendatory prayers over him, and started for the river. Fished all the morning, in a roaring N.E. gale, with the dreadful agonised face between me and the river, pondering on the mystery.'⁴

Before long Kingsley became increasingly troubled by the extent of poverty which he saw in and around Eversley. His brother-in-law, the Rev. J.G. Osbourne (S.G.O. for The Times), sent him accounts of conditions in Dorset which horrified him and made him realise the wide extent of poverty. The various reports were shocking in their contrasts between rich and poor, and they combined with his own observations to demonstrate the truths of Carlyle's Past and Present which Kingsley was reading at the time. Kingsley's social thinking owed much to Thomas Carlyle; in a letter to the Chartist poet Thomas Cooper, Kingsley said there is 'much in Carlyle's 'Chartism' and 'French Revolution' and also a paper called 'Characteristics' ... which is good doctrine and profitable for this age. I cannot say what I personally owe to this man's writings.'⁵ Like Carlyle, Kingsley was infuriated by the idleness of

the ruling classes and frequently crossed swords with his patron, Sir John Cope, whom he pestered to make further social improvements. Towards all social ills Kingsley took a confrontative stance. In a letter written during these formative times he wrote early in 1844:

'I will never believe that a man has a real love for the good and beautiful, except he attacks the evil and the disgusting the moment he sees it! Therefore you must make up your mind to see me, with God's help, a hunter of abuses till the abuses cease - only till then. It is very easy to turn our eyes away from ugly sights, and consider ourselves refined. The refined man to me is he who cannot rest in peace with a coal mine, or a factory, or a Dorsetshire peasant's house near him, in the state in which they are.'⁶

F. D. Maurice and Christian Socialism

Troubled and looking for answers as to the proper relationship between theology and society Kingsley sought the advice of the brilliant theologian F. D. Maurice (1805-1872) whose writings affected him deeply, and seemed to answer every doubt. When Kingsley wrote to Maurice asking for advice about theological difficulties he was establishing a pattern which would continue all his life. Maurice became Kingsley's spiritual counsellor, a standing already apparent when Kingsley first wrote to him:

'To your works I am indebted for the foundation of any coherent view of the word of God, the meaning of the Church of England, and the spiritual phenomena of the present and past ages.'⁷

Kingsley saw Maurice as the key biblical interpreter of the times. After Maurice's controversial Theological Essays (1853) were published Kingsley talked as if these essays were ushering in a new era in the life of the church:

'Maurice's essays, as you say, will constitute an epoch. If the Church of England rejects them, her doom is fixed. She will rot and die, as the Alexandrian did before her. If she accepts them - not as 'a Code Complete', but as a hint towards a new method of thought, she may save herself still.'⁸

Maurice's theology affected Kingsley's religious and social thinking by fusing them together. The master note of Maurice's teaching was the Incarnation, which he proclaimed in the Kingdom of Christ and elsewhere. Here Maurice stressed how the divinity of Christ had given men and society ideals by sanctifying all human relationships. It was here Kingsley found the concept of a gospel for both brains and drains, because furthering the kingdom of God meant not only converting a man but also improving his social environment. Maurice's this-worldly theology was exactly the opposite of the ritualistic revival led by Newman and Pusey.

Maurice's theology further emphasised the importance of community, taking the prevalent competitive society to task and ridiculing those who thought that competition was the law of the universe. Maurice wrote to Kingsley saying competition 'is put forth as the law of the universe. That is a lie. The time is come for us to declare that it is a lie by word and deed.'⁹

The Christian Socialists were formed at the eleventh hour of the Chartist riots of 1848. Christian Socialism was the response of the Broad Church to working class discontent. The group had four leaders between whom there was general agreement but no clear policy : Maurice, Kingsley and John Ludlow (1821-1911) the barrister, and Thomas Hughes (1822-1896), author of Tom Brown's School days (1857). Maurice stated the general outline of the group:

'Politics have been separated from household ties and affections - from art, and science, and literature ... Politics have been separated from Religion. They must start from Atheism, or from the acknowledgement that a Living and Righteous God is ruling in human society not less than in the natural world.'¹⁰

Christian Socialists offered the working classes a distinct type of religion and by changing the role of the church these leaders hoped to heal the wounds between social classes. The church was looked at disparagingly by many working men and perceived as part of the basic structure of the establishment. One Chartist leader gave a good indication of how many workers felt about the church when he said: 'I believe we mostly thought the whole Church Establishment was a matter of money, and that all clergymen did and said their doings and sayings merely to get paid.... We only thought it a humbug, and not worth a sensible man's troubling his head about.'¹¹ As churchmen of the 'Broad' school the Christian Socialists helped liberate working men from the theological quibbles of the evangelicals and the ornateness of the High Church movement. Spurred on by social change the Christian Socialists preached an easily understood religion which placed the practical dimension at the forefront of religious life, and began publishing tracts and periodicals in an effort to propagate their ideas to a larger audience. Directly after the third petition of the Charter in 1848, the group formed a weekly journal called 'Politics for the People' which they hoped would rival the Anglo-Catholic 'Tracts for the Times'. Kingsley's role was primarily journalistic and he drafted several political posters and wrote a number of articles for this short-lived paper under the name of Parson Lot. The Christian Socialists then turned their efforts towards establishing co-operative shops which were similar to those of Robert Owen. These soon failed for lack of funds but never

short of enthusiasm, they launched new experiments in working class education. The Working Men's College was established in 1854 and the Christian Socialists tried to provide better educational programmes for women. They were also to the fore in discussing the sanitation problem in the country and during a cholera epidemic were keenly involved in taking fresh supplies of water during the Bermondsey campaign in 1849. It was especially fitting that in 1875, the year of Kingsley's death, the Public Health Act established a Local Government Board which helped provide sanitary legislation throughout the country.

Kingsley the Novelist

Charles Kingsley, like many Victorians, found time to write on just about every subject. Looking at his many books one realises that besides sermons and novels Kingsley also wrote literary criticism and numerous social and historical essays. To discuss only two of his seven novels is inevitably to misrepresent Kingsley's impact as a novelist and writer, but the scope of this essay makes it impossible to discuss Kingsley's two most popular works : Westward Ho! (1855) which sold over a million copies, and The Water Babies (1863) which still remains immensely popular with children. The discussion here is limited to the two novels, Yeast (1848) and Alton Locke (1850). Kingsley originally took up fiction in an effort to further the cause of the Christian Socialists. In using the novel for the sake of propagating his religious position Kingsley adopted the same methods as Mrs. Gaskell. Both writers wished to express the plight of the workers in a religious perspective. Kingsley knew the popularity of the novel could be used as a force for good and used these methods for his purposes:

'... this is the age of books, the time, one would think, of which Daniel prophesied that many should run to and fro, and knowledge should be increased. A flood of books, newspapers, writings of all sorts, good and bad, is spreading over the whole land, and young and old will read them ... now, if ever, are we bound to put holy and wise books, both religious and worldly, into the hands of all around us ... and now, if ever, are we bound to pray to Christ, the Word of God, that He will raise up among us wise and holy writers ... and that he may confound the devil and all his lies, and all that swarm of writers who are filling England with trash, filth, blasphemy and covetousness.'¹²

Kingsley perceived the 'two nations' problem in theological terms but in terms widely different from Mrs. Gaskell. The Dives-Lazarus parable which Mrs. Gaskell used viewed the social chasm between classes as a rich-poor question, and as was shown in the last chapter she believed the gap between classes could be eased by a mild type of Christian activism. Kingsley's formulation was much more confrontative and he saw the 'two-nation' problem in terms of the Jacob-Esau feud where one brother cheated the other:

'... the two do not comprehend one another, sympathize with one another; they do not even understand one another's speech. The same social and moral gulf has opened between them, as parted the cultivated and wealthy Pharisee of Jerusalem from the rough fishers of the Galilean Lake .'¹³

Kingsley believed it was his peculiar mission to preach the gospel to the working man and to tell Esau that he had a birthright as well as Jacob. Kingsley therefore, like Mrs. Gaskell, wrote novels for the sake of provoking religious people into social action.

Yeast

Yeast (1848) was written in a period of great personal and social tension, following months of involvement with the poor in his parish and more significantly the Chartist demonstrations in 1848.¹⁴ Kingsley was therefore in a good position to be aware of the social fermentation and indeed he wrote Yeast with a sense of heavenly compulsion:

'I know the miserable, peevish, lazy, conceited, faithless, prayerless wretch I am, but I know this, too, that One is guiding me, and driving me when I will not be guided, who has made me, and will make me, go His way and do His work, by fair means or foul. He set me on writing this novel. He has taught me things about the hearts of fast sporting men, and about the condition of the poor, and our duty to them, which I have no doubt He has taught many more, but He has not set anyone else to speak about them in the way in which I am speaking. He has given me a certain artistic knack of utterance (nothing but a knack), but He has done more. He has made the 'Word of the Lord like fire within my bones', giving me no peace till I have spoken out.'¹⁵

Yeast is a disjointed novel which attempts to weave social, political and religious themes round the main character, Lancelot Smith. It is heavily biographical and many of the scenes describe the early relationship between Kingsley and Miss Grenfell; it is the book of which Mrs. Kingsley said: 'Let this book be buried with me. The one I love best.'¹⁶ In discussing many of the key political and religious issues the novel is also typical of the time, and many readers wrote to Kingsley thanking the author for voicing their opinion.¹⁷

Kingsley accepted Carlyle's dialectical teaching that man's perception of the ideal changes with the passing of time due to the growth of human consciousness, and like Carlyle he uses the contrast of an idle aristocracy and a society ready to explode to establish the point

that the social conditions demanded a new type of leadership. What was true regarding the aristocracy in The French Revolution was also true regarding the ruling classes in Yeast, a novel about the aristocracy and written for the aristocracy.¹⁸ Essentially, Yeast deals with the emergence of a squirearchy able to lead the country out of social disintegration by assuming proper leadership. The theme of the growth of a responsible aristocracy is reminiscent of Carlyle's working aristocracy in Past and Present and Disraeli's survey of aristocrats in Coningsby. Kingsley's squires are different because they are primarily motivated by religious beliefs as opposed to heroism or politics.

The novel compares the spiritual reformation of the main character, Lancelot Smith, with an intransigent antiquated aristocracy. As his knightly name suggests, the old traditions must be combined with the new. Lancelot seems to be heading for the same inactivity as the others when he appears in the opening chapter. Kingsley's portrayal is of a dissipated aristocrat who has flitted from subject to subject hoping that something he reads may strike a chord of truth and give his life some meaning. The true academic of his day, Lancelot has read Goethe and Carlyle, and has recently turned to the mysticism of de Sales. The other aristocrats deride Lancelot's gropings and instead of offering guidance make fun of him and try to bring him round to their way of thinking. Much of the novel is spent contrasting Lancelot's views with those of the other characters. The assortment of aristocrats on display provides a contemporary canvassing of political ideas and attitudes among the aristocracy. Kingsley finds character flaws in each. The ruling classes are found to be inattentive to society as a whole, or else controlled by outdated political formulations.

Squire Lavington is the epitome of the bad squire. He is a man who delights in his privileged status and is criticised because he spends most of his time in sport instead of attending to his property. In Squire Lavington the pompousness of Duke Monmouth in Coningsby and the social ignorance of Lord Marney in Sybil are combined. He is the prototype of the ruling class, the richest man in the novel. Kingsley shows that Lavington for all his wealth is socially ignorant. The squire is a ruthless man who acts only out of self-interest. The strict application of the game laws on his property is a perfect reflection of his selfishness, and his malevolence is shown when one of his gamekeepers dies as a result of enforcing these laws. The Squire treats the incident with the same indifference he demonstrates in the hunting scene in the opening chapter. Kingsley also shows the human consequences of the game laws in the case of the poacher Crawy who for lack of steady employment is repeatedly in an out of 'prizzum'. Lavington's failing is that he never accepts personal responsibility and this is demonstrated by his negligent treatment of his workers, and further by his indifference to the poor on his property. His daughter Argemone dies from cholera as a result of working with the poor but not even this loss arouses the Squire from his inertia. As Dickens does with Esther's sickness in Bleak House, so Kingsley shows that cholera is 'nature's counterpart to revolution'.¹⁹

There are other aristocrats who want to revive the political systems of the past. Lord Vieuxbois ('old wood') represents the Young Englanders and his ideas are criticised as a social philosophy in defence of the status quo. His thinking resembles that of Eustace Lyle in Coningsby. Whereas the latter advocated reviving maypole games and the like, Vieuxbois thinks the workers should be content with their low

station in life. His reactionary attitudes are best shown by his opposition to increasing the amount of education for the working classes. Kingsley ridicules this antiquated political system because he realises the world has greatly changed since the middle ages, and so must one's politics. Yet, although Kingsley is highly critical of Vieuxbois's social formula, not all of it is dismissed as irrelevant. Kingsley is sympathetic to the element of faith in Vieuxbois's political structure, and indeed will re-adapt this element in the novel's conclusion.

Colonel Bracebridge stands for the military arm of the ruling classes and is found to be equally undesirable. Bracebridge is a man unfit to govern because he lacks morality. He is a man governed by his passions and is ridiculed because he cannot govern even himself.²⁰ Appropriately he is likened to a stoat who hunts whenever necessary. Bracebridge's imperfections are shown when he ventures across the social boundaries into the poor part of the village only for sexual gratification. As a result of the Colonel's licentiousness, a villager becomes pregnant but he refuses to marry her because she would be beneath him. His resulting suicide has a melodramatic element to it and tragically underlines his inability to make proper decisions. His suicide can also be interpreted as a sign of the explosive path the country could take if the social problems are not amended. Kingsley, like the other social novelists, anticipates the most disastrous consequences if the rich continue to exploit the poor.

Lord Minchampstead embodies the new spirit of creativity and resourcefulness that Kingsley believes is necessary for the times. The praise of his industry recalls Carlyle's eulogy for the working aristocracy. Minchampstead is especially praised for making the world a

better place by combining old methods with the new ones:

'Lord Minchampstead was ... in all things a strong man. Naturally keen, ready, business-like, daring, he had carved out his own way through life, and opened his oyster - the world, neither with sword nor pen, but with steam and cotton ... From a mill-owner he grew to coal-owner, banker, railway director, money-lender to kings and princes; and last of all, as the summit of his own and his compeer's ambition, to land-owner. He had half a dozen estates in as many different counties.' (pp.78-79)

Another aspect of the ruling classes which is attacked is the hoarding aspect of capitalism which benefits the wealthier part of society. Kingsley treats the banking system as another example of the selfish forces which control society. The quick demise of Lancelot's uncle's bank reminds one of the 'Paper Age' section of Carlyle's The French Revolution and of similar episodes involving Mr. Merdle from Dickens's Little Dorrit. In each case the author attacked the paper system and described its collapse as the result of a system rotting itself from within. In Kingsley's opinion, the greed of the banking system and the egotistic ruling class both need dramatic reform. The prime motive for both must be 'universal love' and not 'universal selfishness':

'Selfishness can collect, not unite, a herd of cowardly wild cattle, that they may feed together, breed together, keep off the wolf and bear together. But when one of your wild cattle falls sick, what becomes of the corporate feelings of the herd then? For one man of your class who is nobly helped by his fellows, are not the thousand left behind to perish? Your Bible talks of society, not as a herd, but as a living tree, an organic individual body, a holy brotherhood, and kingdom of God.' (p.194)

The other important aspect of the novel is concerned with Lancelot's social understanding. Lancelot's tutor in life is a humble gamekeeper who awakens Lancelot from his bourgeois dreams by making him aware of the reality of the condition of England. Paul Tregarva, the first

muscular Christian, is a huge Bunyan-like man who possesses a backwoodsman's wisdom, the necessary complement to Lancelot's academic education. The fusion of Lancelot's intelligence and Trégarva's strength symbolises the new type of leadership the times require. In order to have a proper understanding Lancelot must be taken to the villages of Bonesake and Ashy to see the poor for himself. For Lancelot it is a terrible lesson which makes perfectly clear what steps he has to take to help solve the problem of poverty. Kingsley's word pictures are a contrast to those of the other social novelists because he depicts not only rural squalor but more importantly the physical results of poverty. Kingsley could write authoritative accounts because he had seen the poverty at first hand in his parish. Agricultural life was harsh and agricultural workers among the worst housed and fed.²¹ The lessons of his own parish taught Kingsley this, and furthermore he knew that the local squires could do much more than they were doing. One can get an insight into the way villagers felt about their social and economic neglect by citing a few lines from a book written by a villager describing his rural upbringing, The Life of Joseph Arch by Himself (1898): '... Those who owned and held the land believed, and acted up to their belief as far as they were able, that the land belonged to the rich man only, that the poor man had no part or lot in it, and had no sort of claim on society.'²² Kingsley wanted to restore this sense of belonging among the people, chiefly by means of an active aristocracy and clergy. His belief in paternalism and the social benefits of paternalism closely linked him to Disraeli.

Overall Kingsley's rural portrayals in Yeast are distinguished by their emphasis on the degenerating physical condition of the workers as a result of the drudgery in their lives and labours, and of their

inability to purchase good food. Kingsley's inference that the environment is working against the health of the individual adds a 'dreadful dimension to the 'two nations' theme and is an extension of Carlyle's fear of social contagion. The idea that one class is physically regressing on account of the other is a still more stunning concept than Carlyle's account of the Irish widow who unwittingly carries disease to her social superiors.

On this tour of the villages Lancelot must go disguised for fear of someone discovering his aristocratic connections. Visiting a village fair in Bonesake, Lancelot dreams of seeing maypole dancing and other traditional games but there is no such amusement to be found here. The chapter makes a point of stressing how manual work is rigorous and saps the very life from the agricultural workers. Their work is so hard there is no time for amusement. Tregarva describes their mechanical existence:

'... tumble into bed at eight o'clock, hardly waiting to take your clothes off, knowing that you must turn up again at five o'clock the next morning to get a breakfast of bread, and, perhaps, a dab of the squire's dripping, and then back to work again; and so on, day after day, sir, week after week, year after year, without a hope or a chance of being anything but what you are, and only too thankful if you can get work to break your back, and catch the rheumatism over.' (p.167)²³

Lancelot notices the gaunt, underfed look of the villagers and takes pity on the children who sell fruits at the stall. Drinking, wrestling and vice flourish in the damp corners of the village and Lancelot realises these are the combined results of poverty and want:

'He began examining the faces and foreheads of the company, and was astonished at the first glance by the lofty and ample development of brain in at least one half. There were intellects there - or rather capacities of intellect, capable, surely,

of anything, had not the promise of the brow been almost belied by the loose and sensual lower features. They were evidently rather a degraded than an undeveloped race.' (p.174)

The social explorers visit a pub and encounter drunkenness among men, women, and children. There is also singing and dancing with strong political themes:

'I zeed a vire o' Monday night,
A vire both great and high;
But I wool not tell you where, my boys,
Nor wool not tell you why.
The varmer he comes screeching out,
To zave 'uns new brook mare;
Zays I, "You and your stock may roast,
Vor aught us poor chaps care."' (p.180)

Then they travel to Ashy where they view some of the lodgings. In one home a resident lives in a place contaminated by the fever and several members of her family have already died. Outside her home sewage rushes past in a drain sending up a vile stench through the windows and into the house. The woman, hardened to her surrounding, takes no notice. She is totally demoralised. A reflective Lancelot draws a comparison between what he has seen and a wasted stream of sewer water:

'Lancelot sighed as he saw the fruitful materials of food running to waste, and thought of the 'over-population' cry; and then he looked across to the miles of brown moorland on the opposite side of the valley, that lay idle and dreary under the autumn moon, except where here and there a squatter's cottage and rood of fruitful garden gave the lie to the laziness and ignorance of man, who pretends that it is not worth his while to cultivate the soil which God has given him. 'Good heavens!' he thought, 'had our forefathers had no more enterprise than modern landlords, where should we all have been at this moment? Everywhere waste? Waste of manure, waste of land, waste of muscle, waste of brain, waste of population - and we call ourselves the workshop of the world!' (p.187)

The novel concludes by appealing to religion, the other necessary component of proper leadership. Lancelot has a series of theological disputes with his Anglo-Catholic cousin Luke. Their letters to one another discuss a broad range of subjects which extend from the nature of man to the idea of hell and the appeal to an ultimate authority. These were topics on which Kingsley had very strong opinions, which led him into a hostile debate with Cardinal Newman. Luke's religion is roundly rejected because it is seen as otherworldly and womanish. Kingsley makes the same point about the clergy as about the aristocracy, insisting that the 'hungry forties' demand an active clergy prepared to confront social problems rather than retreat into a monastery. Luke is a stark contrast to Tregarva. The Cornishman's rugged faith is vital by comparison to Luke's, and Kingsley shows which type of religion has the greater witness among men. Tregarva's practical convictions take him into the midst of poverty and disease whereas Luke's asceticism places him on the social fringe.

Tregarva's practical mind, however, can only take Lancelot so far, and for further enlightenment, the mysterious figure of Barnakill is provided. Similar to Disraeli's character Sidonia, Barnakill is a man of glorious and great insight. Barnakill is the one figure who can answer the questions which have kept Lancelot back from accepting faith. As an outsider he has profound insight into national and individual problems. In order to transform Lancelot, Barnakill persuades him back to study the values of his own culture and history so he can learn for himself that a nation can be spiritually resurrected. Here Lancelot encounters one last group of social bohemians, the Mellots, an amusing couple who are devoted to art for art's sake. Their appreciation of the beautiful is respected but their otherworldliness in the artistic sense

is condemned with Lord Vieuxbois's social Toryism and Luke's Catholicism. Barnakill on the other hand gives Lancelot the following artistic and spiritual credo:

'Look around you and see what is the characteristic of your country and of your generation at this moment. What a yearning, what an expectation, amid infinite falsehoods and confusions, of some nobler, more chivalrous, more godlike state! Your very costermonger trolls out his belief that "there's a good time coming," and the hearts of gamins, as well as millenarians, answer, "True!" Is not that a clashing among the dry bones? And as for flesh, what new materials are springing up among you every month, spiritual and physical, for a state such as "eye hath not seen nor ear heard?" - railroads, electric telegraphs, associate-lodging houses, club-houses, sanitary reforms, experimental schools, chemical agriculture, a matchless school of inductive science, an equally matchless school of naturalistic painters, - and all this in the very workshop of the world!' (p.248)

Lancelot however is to be more than just a painter and is destined to become a great leader. Like Coningsby, Lancelot requires further time to find his true vocation. Through Barnakill he must first learn that social harmony can only occur if social theory is meshed with faith. Barnakill's social vision recalls Ezekiel's:

'See, I say, what a chaos of noble materials is here, - all confused, it is true, - polarised, jarring, and chaotic, - here bigotry, there self-will, superstition, sheer Atheism often, but only waiting for the one inspiring Spirit to organise, and unite, and consecrate this chaos into the noblest polity the world ever saw realised! What a destiny may be that of your land, if you have but the faith to see your own honour! Were I not of my own country, I would be an Englishman this day.' (p.249)

Barnakill takes Lancelot away to the mystical land of Prester John, a place where man and nature exist in social harmony. Once Lancelot learns his political lessons there, he can return home. The conclusion is an adaptation of Carlyle's emigration theme. Lancelot's departure

from the country is only temporary and is made to gain a better social and spiritual understanding rather than to find work. Kingsley knew that Yeast had a fragmented texture but he felt this reflected the splintered political, social and theological structure of his day. Kingsley's emphasis on spiritual pioneers forging a new society however is a further contribution to the discussion of social problems and provides the proper groundwork for Alton Locke, the next novel to be examined.

Alton Locke

Alton Locke (1850) is a better novel in every respect. Like Mary Barton, it is a novel which seeks to understand the working man's consciousness. In both these novels there is a particular emphasis on the mental and political growth of the main characters which invigorates the story. Kingsley's greater concentration was the result of several key factors. The outbreak of cholera in 1849 involved Kingsley in greater amounts of social work both in Eversley and London.²⁴ Whereas previously it was the Chartist alarm which drew Kingsley to London, now it was the contaminated water. His personal observations in London sickened him and he wrote to his wife: 'God! what I saw! people having no water to drink - hundreds of them - but the water of the common sewer.'²⁵ The findings of Henry Mayhew in the Morning Chronicle further dismayed Kingsley and contributed a great deal towards the publication of his pamphlet 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty' (1850). This pamphlet demonstrated Kingsley's indignation with tailors who made huge profits through the employment of sweated labour. This short work on the theme of exploitation was a preliminary to Alton Locke. Here Kingsley explained the wretched conditions under which these labourers had to work.

Kingsley described how tailors newly arrived in the city were lured to the shops by fraudulent offers of high wages. Once there they were paid a low piece rate and with the high prices they were charged for food and shelter they soon became entrapped by the system. Here Kingsley charged that the Government were the originators of this lamentable system because their contracts for military outfits were the cause of the low wages. Surely, Kingsley felt, the people who made the clothing deserved the same protection and comforts their labour gave to the military. In 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty' Kingsley introduced an aspect in his social teaching which had been absent in Yeast. Kingsley and the rest of the Christian Socialists thought one solution to the problems of this marketplace was the formation of workers' associations. Kingsley called upon workers to unite in associations which would benefit them all; no longer would each man have to fend for himself:

'It is competition that is ruining us, and competition is division, disunion, every man for himself, every man against his brother. The remedy must be in association, co-operation, self-sacrifice for the sake of one another.'²⁶

Furthermore Kingsley began corresponding with two Chartists, Walter Cooper and Thomas Cooper, in an effort to gain further information regarding the working classes. To Thomas Cooper Kingsley wrote: 'I want someone like yourself, intimately acquainted with the mind of the working classes, to give me such an insight into their life and thoughts, as may enable me to consecrate my powers effectively to their service.'²⁷ Such a petition for further information is as plausible as it would have been from either Mrs. Gaskell or Charles Dickens. It would, of course, be unthinkable with Disraeli.

Alton Locke was a novel heavily indebted to Thomas Carlyle. The controversial nature of Yeast made it difficult for Kingsley to find a publisher and it was only through Carlyle's strong recommendation to Chapman and Hall that the book was published at all. Secondly, the characterisation of one of the main characters, Sandy Mackaye, the emphasis on realism, and the themes of clothes and the subjects of education and emigration all betray a Carlylean origin. Carlyle's own opinion of the novel was mixed. While saying he 'found plenty to like' in Alton Locke he also termed the book as 'crude' and urged Kingsley on to greater literary achievements.²⁸

Alton Locke shows the influence of Carlyle in another important respect. Here Kingsley begins to view the evils he writes about symbolically. This is a step forward from the realistic presentation in Yeast. Kingsley's discussion of the sweaters' miserable existence hinges round the consuming quality of their labour. Kingsley shows how the tailors are slowly eaten alive by the system. This is hinted at in 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty' where Kingsley says: 'Sweet Competition! Heavenly maid! ... Man eating man, eaten by man, in every variety of degree and method! Why does not some enthusiastic political economist write an epic on 'The Consecration of Cannibalism'?'²⁹

Alton Locke is the autobiography of a working class tailor who becomes a poet. By giving the novel an autobiographical structure, Kingsley is able to discuss several social issues such as poverty and the social gulf between classes and to explain Chartism, the foremost working class political movement of the day. Kingsley was closer to the people than Carlyle was and therefore his portrayal was more realistic. For example, Carlyle's pictures of the working class in 'Chartism' as a dumb mass pleading for both guidance and leadership, a description one

might reasonably suppose limited to describing the smoke instead of the fire. In the first section of 'Chartism' Carlyle wrote: 'Chartism means the bitter discontent grows fierce and mad , the wrong condition therefore or the wrong disposition, of the Working Classes of England.'³⁰ Kingsley's pictures were altogether different and sought to give the character of Alton Locke not only the voice of the working class, but also to describe their common experience. In so doing Kingsley helped show the working class was articulate.

Alton Locke is a novel which seeks to instruct its readers concerning the deplorable conditions agricultural and textile workers face in a competitive society. Poverty and death lay far up stream in Yeast but now these disturbing social facts are brought to the front in the novel. Alton Locke is different from Yeast in another significant respect as it is largely a novel centred on London. Scenes of the country are for the most part used to reinforce by contrast the stifling quality of city life.

Alton is a deprived Cockney child and his parents' low income has restricted his upbringing to Richmond Hill, a poor area in London. Kingsley makes it clear that Alton lives in a limited world and the closest he comes to the world of nature are the vegetables he sees on the vendors' stands in the streets.

His mind and body have suffered from the oppressed life within London and his frame has been scarred and weakened by asthma, rickets and consumption. Even worse, Alton's mind is warped in childhood. His father's early death breaks the stability of the family and Alton's mother turns to an extreme Baptist sect in search of emotional support. Mrs. Locke raises her son in a narrow, unnatural way. Her puritanical

religion keeps the punishments of hell instead of the assurances of heaven before her children's eyes. She further blights her children's imaginations by allowing them to read only religious books but even with these restrictions Alton shows an early fondness for literature. It is clear that Alton suffers from the same type of repressive mother as Arthur Clennam does in Little Dorrit. Sundays are especially bleak, filled with unhappiness which later becomes a haunting memory. Like Arthur's monotonous Sundays, Alton's Sundays are days when all amusement is forbidden. There is only sermon reading and introspection. His mother often has clergy and missionaries to dinner. Even then the majority of ministers behave like the clerk Mr. Wopsle from Great Expectations and spend more time preaching to Alton about 'higher doctrine' than having a genuine interest in him.

Alton's fortunes change when his uncle finds him a tailoring job. The move to a new place of work allows Alton to meet the two men who shape his intellectual and moral life, Sandy Mackaye and Crossthwaite. His experiences in the tailor's shop drive him to contradict the doctrines of submission he has heard endlessly from his mother and the Church. The working conditions are intolerable, the temperatures are so high the workers resort to drinking gin. The descriptions of the shop are similar to Mayhew's account in the Morning Chronicle. The workers jokingly call their den 'Conscrumptive Hospital' because few can survive there more than six months. One of the workers, Crossthwaite, the unacknowledged leader of the group, feels sorry for Alton and protects him from the others' gibes. Crossthwaite is a remarkable worker because he has remained unaffected by the surroundings and retains his humanity.

Despite the unhealthy conditions the young tailor's attentions are concerned with his own self-improvement. On his way home from work one afternoon Alton discovers a book shop and begins reading the various books on display, finding food for his starved imagination. Soon Alton befriends the owner, Sandy Mackaye, a craggy old Scotsman who becomes Alton's tutor and teaches the aspiring tailor to think independently, and furthermore encourages him to identify closely with the working class movements. Under Sandy's charge Alton receives a classical education par excellence, studying Greek, Latin and English literature. The liberal education opens up for Alton the world his mother has tried to suppress. The discovery of literature causes him to reject his mother's binding religious suppositions.

Alton goes to live with Sandy where his education continues. Under Sandy's guidance, he slowly comes to realise that he must use his poetic skills for the cause of the working classes. Yet Alton's early attempts at poetry have little to do with the subjects he studies within Sandy's bookstore. A chance visit to his uncle's allows him to meet his cousin George who is down for a brief stay from a Cambridge college. Alton goes to Cambridge to visit his cousin and to search for a publisher for some of his poetry. Alton's walk to Cambridge marks the first time he has ever been out of the city and into the country. Like Wordsworth, he is moved by nature's restorative powers. While walking he discovers the beauty of the changing scenery and compares what he sees that afternoon with what he has known before:

'It was a glorious morning at the end of May; and when I escaped from the pall of smoke which hung over the city, I found the sky a sheet of cloudless blue. How I watched for the ending of the row of houses, which lined the road for miles - the great roots of London, running far out into the country, up which

poured past me an endless stream of food and merchandise and human beings - the sap of the huge metropolitan life-tree! How each turn of the road opened a fresh line of terraces or villas, till hope deferred made the heart sick, and the country seemed - like the place where the rainbow touches the ground, or the El Dorado of Raleigh's Guiana settler - always a little farther off!' (p.89)

Yet there are various class differences even within the country.

On his travels Alton goes into a forest for the first time and notices the property has been fenced off to keep the aristocratic owner's game and timber safe. The contrast between the way this aristocratic family and the clergy of a neighbouring village live and the harsh and miserable existence of the workers is impossible to miss. One villager says:

'Oh! religion's all very well for them as has time for it; and a very good thing - we ought all to mind our latter end. But I don't see how a man can hear sermons with an empty belly; and there's so much to fret a man, now, and he's so cruel tired coming home o' nights, he can't nowise go to pray a lot, as gentlefolks does.' (p.95)

Alton notices other examples of class inequalities when he arrives in Cambridge, a place where the dress, language and architecture are different from anything he has ever known. Here Alton becomes aware of his class deficiencies in the same way as Pip is made class conscious by Estella's and Miss Havisham's remarks at Satis House. Shortly after arriving Alton is accidentally pushed into the river Cam by an aristocrat just as a fly might be swatted with the hand. The lesson here is that the privileged class even robs the poor of their dignity. Alton's time at Cambridge reveals the extreme differences in opportunity between him and his cousin. The contrast between the two, the one a struggling tailor, the other the son of a rich banker, is as vivid as Mrs. Gaskell's contrast between Margaret and Bessy in North and South. George is a

typical arriviste whose goal is to become a member of the aristocracy by means of the church. Furthermore his Tractarian beliefs contribute to a religious viewpoint which, so Kingsley believed, favoured the rich.³¹

Through George, Alton is introduced to aristocratic tastes and circles and his poetic vision is momentarily confused by what he sees and he wrongly equates outward signs of wealth with natural goodness. Alton meets several members of the aristocracy and the church. Most, like George and his college friends, are social climbers. Others however greatly impress Alton as when he goes to dinner and meets Dean Winnstay, a man praised by Kingsley because of his interest in science and new ideas, a great contrast to the bigoted religiosity of Alton's mother. Here Alton also meets Lord Lynedale, the man who accidentally pushed him into the river. Instead of being a snob, Lynedale is the epitome of good breeding. He is witty, widely travelled and an athlete. He is a born leader of men and Alton respects him. Like Lord Vieuxbois in Yeast he represents Young England and is engaged in cottage work with the poor. Eleanor, Lynedale's wife, unknowingly makes the biggest impression on Alton when she secretly passes him a note defining the nature of true gentility. Like Dickens's Great Expectations the novel teaches a humble resignation to one's status in life.³² Another positive benefit is offered by George, who takes Alton to places he has never been before. At Dulwich Abbey for example the young debutant becomes enraptured with the sensuous painting of St. Sebastian by Guido. Here Alton's appetite for physical beauty is enhanced when he meets Lord Lynedale's daughter, Lillian, and is so taken with her beauty that he begins to write love poetry. Yet these early encounters are only flirtations and Alton soon learns that beneath aristocratic mores lies class warfare.

The astute Mackaye remains aware of his lodger's struggles. Sandy directs Alton's infatuated mind to the commonplace lives of some working women in St. Giles. Here, Mackaye thinks, lie the themes of true poetry:

'True poetry, like true charity, my laddie, begins at hame. If ye'll be a poet at a', ye maun be a cockney poet; and while the cockneys be what they be, ye maun write, like Jeremiah of old, o'lamentation and mourning and woe, for the sins o' your people. Gin you want to learn the spirit o' a people's poet, down wi' your Bible and read thae auld Hebrew prophets; gin ye wad learn the style, read your Burns frae morning till night; and gin ye'd learn the matter, just gang after your nose, and keep your eyes open, and ye'll no miss it.'
(p.68)

Mackaye takes Alton to a dim house in the heart of London and shows the dazed poet scenes of modern tragedy. There in the top room of an overcrowded, crumbling house is a scene of dire poverty. Several knitters are at work weaving riding gear for the aristocrats but they have nothing to show for their labours. There is hardly any furniture, heat or light. Pieces of cloth which have fallen off their clothing are packed round the windows to keep out the cold. Kingsley is not content with mere physical descriptions. One of the major differences between Yeast and Alton Locke is that the latter gives individual voices to many of the poor represented. In Alton Locke the reader not only sees the physical deprivation but is made to confront the individual voices of complaint. One of the young girls speaks about the temptations prostitution offers under such severe conditions. Parts of what she says recall the Dives-Lazarus theme which Mrs. Gaskell used so extensively in Mary Barton two years earlier. There may have been an influence here because Kingsley had great regard for Mrs. Gaskell and especially for Ruth.³³ This poor woman's apocalyptic testimony has the same tone as

many of Bessy Higgins's statements in North and South, who dies from excessive hardship at the Milton factory:

'I should have been just as bad as any of them, if the Lord had not kept me out of temptation in His great mercy, by making me the poor, ill-favoured creature I am. From that time I was burnt when I was a child, and had the small-pox afterwards, oh! how sinful I was, and repined and rebelled against the Lord! And now I see it was all His blessed mercy to keep me out of evil, pure and unspotted for my dear Jesus, when He comes to take me to Himself. I saw Him last night, Mr. Mackaye, as plain as I see you now, all in a flame of beautiful white fire, smiling at me so sweetly; and He showed me the wounds in His hands and His feet, and He said, "Ellen, my own child, those that suffer with me here, they shall be glorified with me hereafter, for I'm coming very soon to take you home."' (p.69)

The new economic conditions have affected both young and old. One young mother has sold her body repeatedly in order to feed her daughter. The old suffer as well; one senile woman rubs her hands over a fireplace long cold where she sits mumbling her fears of going to the workhouse.

Alton's knowledge of the working classes expands as working conditions change at the tailoring shop where he works. When Alton's employer dies so does an honourable relationship between employer and employee. Here Kingsley demonstrates for his audience the extent of the cash-nexus system and shows how this is an element in the workers' overall suffering which turns them into Chartists. The son who inherits the sweatshop changes the working conditions because he wants to make more money. He reduces the wages to compete against the government who pay the lowest wage of any. His thinking is solely motivated by profit and he justifies his parsimony by appealing to a warped brand of economics and middle class moral code:

'Besides, wages had really been quite exorbitant. Half his men threw each of them as much money away in gin and beer yearly, as would pay two workmen at cheap house. Why was he to be robbing his family of comforts to pay for their extravagance? And charging his customers, too, unnecessarily high prices - it was really robbing the public!' (p.78)

Some of the workers rebel against these changes for they realise the working conditions will become progressively worse. The working hours will increase while wages will decline. Crossthwaite considers their prospects:

'You all know where this will end - in the same misery as fifteen thousand out of twenty thousand of our class are enduring now. We shall become the slaves, often the bodily prisoners, of Jews, middlemen, and sweaters, who draw their livelihood out of our starvation. We shall have to face, as the rest have, ever decreasing prices of labour, ever increasing profits made out of that labour by the contractors who will employ us - arbitrary fines, inflicted at the caprice of hirelings - the competition of women, and children, and starving Irish - our hours of work will increase one-third, our actual pay decrease to less than one-half; and in all this we shall have no hope, no chance of improvement in wages, but ever more penury, slavery, misery, as we are pressed on by those who are sucked by fifties - almost by hundreds - yearly, out of the honourable trade in which we were brought up, into the infernal system of contract work, which is devouring our trade and many others, body and soul. (pp.79-80)

These are the same economic and social pressures Dickens was to mention in describing the factory hands in Coketown and for these workers too it is a hopeless situation. Crossthwaite expresses a shared feeling among the workers that the government is merely an extension of the wealthier class in terms reminiscent of Dickens in Bleak House:

'Why, what in the name of common sense - what interest or feeling of yours or mine, or any man's you ever spoke to, except the shopkeeper, do Alderman A or Lord C-D represent? They represent property - and

we have none. They represent rank - we have none. Vested interests - we have none. Large capitals - those are just what crush us. Irresponsibility of employers, slavery of the employed, competition among masters, competition among workmen, that is the system they represent - they preach it, they glory in it, - Why, it is the very ogre that is eating us all up. They are chosen by the few, they represent the few, and they make laws for the many - and yet you don't know whether or not the people are represented!' (p.83)

The worker is trapped on all sides and must either work and barely stay alive or strike for better conditions and starve. Kingsley goes further in his social criticism than Dickens does in Hard Times and is not content with the phrase 'aw's a muddle'. The numerous wrongs do more in the life of Alton Locke than in that of Stephen Blackpool and where the latter leaves town the other seeks to destroy the system which has unfairly penalised him.

Alton slowly becomes aware of these class differences and realises that he is playing a game where the rules are written by someone else and by someone he can never be like. Alton recalls it is Lynedale who pushed him into the river and remembers the Dean advising him to take the radical elements out of his poetry. He sees that Lynedale receives all the credit for the translation work which he in fact has done. His understanding of the two nations grows and he rejects the lies of the aristocracy.

The novel then turns its focus on the city. One benefit Alton receives by visiting Cambridge has nothing to do with the aristocracy. A farmer gives Alton a ride in his cart to Cambridge and during the journey they talk about London and the farmer explains how he has lost contact with his son, who is a tailor like Alton, and working somewhere in London. This chance meeting leads to an investigation of the evils

of the dens mentioned in Chapter XXI. Kingsley repeats much of what he says in 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty'. Again Kingsley allows the starving tailors to tell their own pathetic stories.

The assembled group of Alton, Sandy, Farmer Porter and a policeman make their way to London's East End. Alton's experiences are shared by other tailors desperate for work. Before they have travelled far, Alton is approached by a woman who recognises he is a tailor because of his gaunt figure, and offers him work and lucrative wages. Feigning interest the group is taken to the shop. There Alton realises the sweatshop is being run by a former tailor he has worked with before. Jemmy Downes, like many of the tailors, has failed to rise above the sweatshop system. Having left the 'honourable' trade at the same time as Alton did, Jemmy became a 'front-man' for a 'dishonourable' shop, the very type the government paid to have their tailoring done. Wages are so low Jemmy and his entire family are starving to death. Alton forces his way upstairs to see if he knows any of the tailors there who can assist him in his search for Porter's son. There he sees an awful scene. The workers are starved beyond physical recognition. By chance one of the tailors recognises Alton's voice and tells him Porter's boy is employed there too. It is his old friend, Mike Kelly who pleads to be taken away with Porter's son:

'Oh! blessed saints, take me out o' this! take me out for the love of Jesus! take me out o' this hell, or I'll go mad intirely! Och! will nobody have pity on poor sowl's in purgatory - here in prison like negur slaves? We're starved to the bone, we are, and kilt intirely with cowl'd.'
(p.157)

Kelly has been working so long simply to keep alive that parts of his body bleed openly. Assuredly he too has been a prisoner and is eaten alive:

'Och! Mother of Heaven! he went on, wildly, 'when will I get out to the fresh air? For five months I haven't seen the blessed light of sun, nor spoken to the praste, nor ate a bit o' mate, barring bread-and-butter. Shure, it's all the blessed Sabbaths and saints' days I've been a-working like a haythen Jew, an niver seen the insides o' the chapel to confess my sins, and me poor sowl's lost intirely.' (p.157)

Kelly and Porter are the fortunate ones because they are taken away.

The others face the dire prospect of either going to other shops or staying in the place where they already are.

The government does not interfere. Indeed the government sanctions the existing arrangements when it should condemn and outlaw the system of sweatshops. The best the government can do is represented by the policeman who passively takes notes of the sweatshop. No doubt these records will be consigned to the government.

Alton Locke attempts to give to Kingsley's audience a total picture in the same way Dickens did with his later novels. Alton Locke makes further comment on the lives of the agricultural poor which the author had first dealt with in Yeast. Here too Kingsley's treatment contributes to the overall theme of the novel, the degradation of the working class. Again the literary device by which information about agricultural life is conveyed is that of a search anticipating the into 'darkest England' idea of the later nineteenth century and used by Walter Besant and William Booth. Alton travels to the eastern part of the country representing the Chartists. He discovers a harsh countryside where troubles are brewing. Given the poverty, it is hardly surprising. The agricultural workers' lives are viewed in all their harshness and shown to be reduced to a joyless existence. On the first night of the trip Alton stays with a shoemaker where he hears the cottagers

complain because they no longer have the benefits of the protection of the aristocrats and the benefits of commonland which hitherto has helped sustain their rugged lives. What these men and others complain of Carlyle termed the cash-nexus system. More follows the next day as Alton travels to hear a group of a thousand workers who have gathered for a meeting to air their grievances. On the way there Alton notices the 'desolate' metallic quality to the land. Alton wonders where the people live in such a place. Here in the country the first sounds of humanity are the pleadings of two small boys who are labouring for the ridiculous sum of one shilling a week. The earth they till is barren, cleared of all shrubs and trees. All that remains is burnt grass and turnips; it is a deathly and desolate place. Alton helps the boys loosen the frosted soil. In doing so Alton learns that labour dominates their lives and that there are no churches or schools in their village.

Travelling deeper into the country Alton arrives at the meeting of the agricultural workers. He sees how haggard they look and more importantly he hears their complaints. One man is disgruntled because he has been dismissed by a farmer he has worked with for seven years. He has a family to support yet he cannot find steady work. Another man thinks he has pinpointed the problem which has resulted in so much unemployment. He blames the farmers and says they are lying when they say there is no work to be done. The farmers offer no work because they profit by waiting and doing nothing. One sickly man stands up and says the reason why the farmers take away the common land is that they are afraid the labourers will not work as hard because with the common land in existence they would be saving energy to work on their strips of land. The workers are damned either way:

'First they says they can't afford to work the land 'emselves, and then they wain't let us work it either. Then they says prices is so low they can't keep us on, and so they lowers our wages; and then the prices goes up ever so much, our wages don't go up with 'em. So, high prices or low prices, it's all the same. With the one we can't buy bread, and with the other we can't get work.' (p.205)

Another says the problem is really a problem of economics. Their poverty is the result of having to provide the profits for both farmers and the aristocrats. Next a woman airs her grievances. She tries to incite the men into action by calling them cowards. She has much to complain about. She is unemployed and has tended her seven children through illnesses. She has received little help from the poor board and refuses to enter the poorhouse because she knows she would be separated from her family. These bitter complaints are a contrast to the blind man who stands up and perceives the social problem as theological instead of economic:

'Its all along of our sins, and our wickedness - because we forgot Him - it is ... how we all forgot the Lord, and went after our own lusts and pleasures - squires and parsons, and farmers and labouring folk, all alike ... He has turned His face from us, and that's why we're troubled.' (pp.208-209)

But the crowd is not interested in religious talk. The final speaker catches the full attention of the listeners and urges the workers to steal food instead of working for it. So pitiful is the plight of the poor that crime is more attractive than godliness. Alton tries to reason with the crowd, but they are more concerned with food than politics. Alton becomes carried away with the emotion of the crowd and tells them to riot. Immediately the demonstrators converge on a nearby farm where they satisfy their hunger for food and violence. While they sack the farmhouse the troops arrive and in the clash Alton is taken prisoner.

The riot has many victims and destroys many of those who initiate it. Nevertheless the revolt seems justified to the reader, an aspect unique to Kingsley's account. This is in contrast to the other social novelists. In the sacking of Mowbray Castle in Disraeli's Sybil, the author's main purpose is to link the riot with inadequate leadership by the aristocracy. A blundering aristocracy had cruelly neglected the workers and ignored their cry of a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. Insurrection spreads because of widespread suffering and the poor people soon flock to Bishop Hatton, a working class leader whose lust for destruction is great. There are no riots in Dickens's Hard Times, but that novel does concentrate on the problem of the mob in the persecution of Stephen Blackpool. Dickens like Disraeli feared the danger of peaceful crowds being turned into angry mobs by vitriolic leaders and the reader can hardly miss the significance of the union subscribing to the 'gospel according to Slackbridge'. Mrs. Gaskell's North and South comes the closest to Kingsley's account. There the riot before Thornton's factory contains both good and bad elements. On the one hand the riot seems justified but on the other hand the author is afraid of the violence which can possibly erupt.

Alton's trial marks another occasion where the poor are the victims. The legal system too favours the rich. Alton is sentenced to three years imprisonment even though a last minute witness proves his innocence. The court procedure is an affront to justice. Instead of being a place where justice is sought, the court is a playground for the wealthy:

'It was all a play, a game of bowls - the bowls happening to be human heads - got up between the lawyers, for the edification of society; and it would have been a pity not to play it out, according to the rules and regulations thereof.' (p.217)

The three years in prison fuel Alton's resentment against social injustice. Alton utilises his time in prison by reading but even here he is limited to the books his religious jailer allows him to read. When Alton finally leaves prison his morale is at its lowest point but he remains with the Chartists although he is more an observer than a participant. He watches the nature of the movement change and hesitates between Crossthwaite's claims that the Chartists should make a physical show of force to a passive government and Sandy's message of moral force which preaches individual reform. The workers choose the former and Mackaye, who would have favoured non-violence, prophetically dies on the eve of the Third Petition, which is a complete failure. Vanquished by the failure of the Petition, Alton grows depressed. Everywhere he sees signs which sorely remind him that the few rich are stronger than the many poor. He passes shopkeepers on the street whose motivation is the prospect of higher income and not social equity. He sees his privileged cousin George with Lillian living a life of luxury and oblivious to the events which have occurred that day.

Alton's response to these events is different from John Barton's who too was in a similar demonstration in Mary Barton. Barton's anger was so fierce after Parliament's rejection of the Petition that it drove him to kill Henry Carson. Alton by contrast does not have the strength or the will to do the same. He attempts to fight his cousin George but is quickly overpowered. His thoughts momentarily turn to suicide but are diverted when he notices his old working partner Jemmy Downes about to throw himself off a bridge. Alton helps the drunken Downes return home and the episode demonstrates that the turn of events is not getting any better for the poor. Again Kingsley's main point is that the workers are being eaten alive by the competitive system. When they return

to Downes residence, Alton learns Jemmy's wife and children have died upstairs of the fever. Alton discovers to his amazement that the family has been drinking sewer water. The polluted waters feed on the harsh lives of those who live near the Thames. Kingsley uses the grotesque picture to show how the evils of society unite together to destroy men. Jemmy becomes another victim when he rushes off to fetch Alton some drinking water and falls into the foul ditch to die quickly in the poisoned waters:

'We rushed out on the balcony. The light of the policeman's lantern glared over the ghastly scene - along the double row of miserable house-backs, which lined the sides of the open tidal ditch - over strange rambling jetties, and balconies, and sleeping-sheds, which hung on rotting piles over the black waters, with phosphorescent scraps of rotten fish gleaming and twinkling out of the dark hollows, like devilish grave-lights-over bubbles of poisonous gas, and bloated carcasses of dogs, and lumps of offal, floating on the stagnant olive-green hell-broth-over the slow sullen rows of oily ripple which were dying away into the darkness far beyond, sending up, as they stirred, hot breaths of miasma - the only sign that a spark of humanity, after years of foul life, had quenched itself at last in that foul death. I almost fancied that I could see the haggard face staring up at me through the slimy water; but no, it was as opaque as stone.' (p.262)

In Alton Locke Kingsley's message is that there is no escape from the disease which spreads to all classes. Kingsley reiterates the message of social contagion he learned from Carlyle. Kingsley, as did Dickens later in the character of Jo the crossing sweeper in Bleak House, demonstrates how the threat of sickness proves there is a link between all classes. The workers are contaminated and they in turn pass on their disease to others. George dies from an infected piece of clothing one of the ill weavers has tried to keep warm with.³⁴ Lillian, too, like Esther Summerson, loses her physical beauty because of sickness. Even

Alton takes ill having had contact with the polluted waters. For Alton physical sickness becomes the vehicle for spiritual health, a pattern Kingsley would want to apply to all society. Alton's fever is highlighted by evolutionary dreams which mark crucial changes in his thinking. His mind must literally travel all the way back from the Fall of man to his resurrection in Christ. The messenger for redemption is Eleanor who like Dante's Beatrice acts like a magnetic force and attracts Alton towards true enlightenment. Eleanor's message, like Barnakill's, emphasises the recreative powers of man by the grace of God:

'You shall build cities, and they shall crumble;
you shall invent forms of society and religion,
and they shall fail in the hour of need ... feature
by feature, and limb by limb, ye shall renew it;
age after age, gradually and painfully, by hunger
and pestilence, by superstitions and tyrannies, by
need and blank despair ...' (p.275)

Eleanor is Alton's nurse as well as his tutor. She teaches Alton the tenets of Christian Socialism which she herself has learned from the association group she has worked with. Moreover she teaches him a Christianity which emphasises the fatherhood of a God who sees the rich and poor as equals. She makes Alton realise that liberty is something which can only come from religion and can never arise from any creed or demonstration. If the workers must have a Charter, it should be the bible.

The novel concludes on the Carlylean theme of emigration. Alton and Crossthwaite emigrate to Texas because there is better opportunity for them to realise their democratic ideals in America than in aristocratic Britain. They plan to return to England after the efforts of individuals like Eleanor to bring lasting social harmony through

establishing associations. Alton dies during the journey across the Atlantic but Crossthwaite reaches America and returns seven years later. To end the book with the emigration of Alton and Crossthwaite has been seen as inconclusive on Kingsley's part.³⁵ To dismiss the main characters at the conclusion of the novel after spending the majority of the novel describing injustice through their eyes implies the negative conclusion that only meagre social advances can be made by the working classes in Britain and so emigration becomes necessary. My own feeling however leads me to think that the final chapter was more than a regurgitation of Carlyle's ideas. On the contrary, in Alton's death Kingsley helped the public to understand that although emigration might help to eliminate some of the problems, it was definitely not the social panacea some thought it was. Alton dies from the harshness of his suffering which no change of scenery could ever ameliorate. According to Kingsley, reform in Britain was far more important than emigration and in Alton's life and death he hoped to show how deep was the suffering for many of the poor. By offering a full diagnosis of the nation's ills Kingsley believed a more effective cure could be brought about.

Conclusion

Kingsley gave up writing political novels after Alton Locke and Yeast for several reasons. One reason was the collapse of the Christian Socialist movement. It lacked a clearly thought out social programme and failed to enlist working class support. The confusion was best demonstrated by the behaviour of the leaders of the movement who preached spiritual and moral reform and yet at bottom were social Tories who hoped for a union between the aristocracy and the working classes. This

tension was shown when Kingsley mistakenly proclaimed himself a Chartist when in actuality his political ideas were similar to Disraeli's. These inconsistencies were further demonstrated by Kingsley's two Prefaces to Alton Locke (1854, 1861). In his Preface to Cambridge undergraduates Kingsley congratulates the changed demeanour of the aristocracy which has helped pave the way for social improvement. He writes: 'There is no aristocracy in the world, and there never has been one, as far as I know, which has so honourably repented, and brought forth fruits meet for repentance.'³⁶ The Preface to the workers on the other hand chastises the working men for not giving enough support to the various association schemes. The tension is also felt in the novel itself. Kingsley builds a most sympathetic account of a Chartist in Alton but he only allows the tailor's radicalism to go so far, for in the end he is admonished by Eleanor to wait for the 'rapidly-increasing class among the clergy' which is going to reform the nation. All these examples then show that Kingsley was sympathetic towards the working class, far more than Disraeli ever was, but at the same time he would never allow them to take matters into their own hands. The longing for union between the priests and the people is essentially the same as Disraeli's vision of a bond between the aristocracy and the workers. Another reason for the movement's decline was the improved economic conditions of the 1850's which took the sense of urgency out of the cooperatives. A last factor was that Kingsley's attentions shifted and he took up writing nature books and historical novels. It became increasingly clear to Kingsley that his new mission was to unearth the divine element in nature.³⁷ Nevertheless, inconsistencies and all, Kingsley was an impressive man whose knowledge, preaching and teaching touched all social classes. He achieved a status few other Victorians acquired. As G. M. Young says in his Portrait of an Age:

'Kingsley was relieving many souls of their burden by communicating his own delight in the body, in the ardours of exploration, sport, and sex ... the name of Kingsley, naturalist, health reformer, poet and preacher, on the one hand silenced as an advocate of socialism, on the other denounced as a propagator of impurity, may stand for the meeting-place of all the forces at work on the younger imagination of the years when, as it seemed to those who recalled the sordid and sullen past, England was renewing her youth ...'³⁸

As one of the most popular preachers of the day, Kingsley chose the sermon form for his novels which contained a mixture of Christian Socialism and self help. By writing 'holy and wise' books which were also 'religious and worldly' Kingsley believed he could positively influence the upper classes. In this way Kingsley could vividly describe the conditions and voices of the poor and at the same time present his individualistic message of reform which he learned from his broad religion. Yeast and Alton Locke therefore represent another middle class attempt to quell the social storm which many saw on the horizon. Christian Socialism was a significant force which like Disraeli's Young England movement and Mrs. Gaskell's Unitarianism confronted the problems created by industrialism. Kingsley's wrath was specifically directed towards the light industries of tailoring and shoemaking and he once wrote: 'I conceive it a very great evil that large bodies of men should be employed in exclusively performing, day after day, the same minute mechanical operation, till their whole intellect is concentrated on it, and their fingers kept delicate for the purpose.'³⁹ His novels suggest both the depth of his anger and the measure of his sympathy.

Charles Dickens, the last of our authors to be studied in this thesis, shared the same passion for social reform as Kingsley. Both men were alike in their concern and labour on behalf of the poor but whereas Kingsley poured his energies into caring for his parish church in

Eversley, Dickens concentrated his literary skills as a novelist and editor in London. Dickens was by far the more talented writer and his literary vision was broader than that of the rest of the social novelists. None of his books read like tracts and where the other writers present specific details regarding the poor Dickens has the genius to tackle the philosophic theories which cause unnecessary poverty and waste. Having made these distinctions, let us turn to the greatest writer of the era.

Footnotes to Chapter Five

1. Mrs. Frances E. Kingsley (editor), Charles Kingsley His Letters and Memories of his Life, Two Volumes, Henry S. King, 1877, Volume I, p.36.
2. Charles Kingsley, 'Great Cities and their influence for good and evil', Sanitary and Social Essays, Macmilland Co., 1880, p.190. For Kingsley the Bristol riots were as impressionable as Dickens's experience at Warren's. When preaching in Bristol years later Kingsley recalled these events and remarked:

'When the first excitement of horror and wonder were past, what I had seen made me for years the veriest aristocrat, full of hatred and contempt of these dangerous classes, whose existence I had for the first time discovered.'
3. Guy Kendall, Charles Kingsley and His Ideas, Hutchinson and Co., 1947, p.22.
4. A. L. Rowse, 'Charles Kingsley at Eversley', Contemporary Review, Volume 222, January 1973, p.7. Rowse's articles are stimulating introductions to Kingsley the man.
5. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.378.
6. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.121.
7. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.127.
8. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.371.
9. Alec R. Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, Harmondsworth, 1961, p.96.
10. Louis Cazamain, The Social Novel in England 1830-1850, p.249.
11. Vidler, p.94.
12. P. G. Scott, 'Kingsley as Novelist', Theology, Volume LXXVIII, January 1975, p.10. This is a centenary issue with many useful essays.
13. Charles Kingsley, Yeast (1848), Macmillan, 1888, p.xii. This is from the Preface to the Fourth Edition. All references are to this edition.
14. Yeast was published in Fraser's Magazine in 1848 and then in book form in 1851.
15. Kendall, p.107.
16. Kendall, pp.107-108.

17. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.286. Mrs. Kingsley includes the following testimony from a reader who had just finished Yeast:

'I find that I am quite correct, that I have not exaggerated your capacity at all; and having, day and night, meditated on what you have to say, I feel that the confirmation I have got from you is sufficient. But I have emerged from a mephitic cavern into the open day. In the midst of worldly reserves, such as I never before experienced, I feel a mental serenity I never before knew; can see life and my role in life, clear and definite for the first time, through all manner of intervening entanglements.

18. Kingsley's liberal religious beliefs would have been in keeping with the changing view of history Carlyle explained in the 'Church-Clothes' section in Sartor Resartus, p.149:

'Meanwhile, in our era of the World, those same Church-Clothes have gone sorrowfully out-at-elbows : nay, for worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells; but only spiders and unclean beetles, in horrid accumulation, drive their trade; and the mask still glares on you with its glass-eyes, in ghastly affectation of Life, - some generation-and-half after Religion has quite withdrawn from it, and in unnoticed nooks is weaving for herself new Vestures, wherewith to reappear, and bless us, or our sons or grandsons.'

19. Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens (1959), selections found in Charles Dickens Bleak House, edited by A. E. Dyson, Macmillan, 1969, p.195.
20. Charles Kingsley, 'Heroism', Sanitary and Social Essays. In this sermon Kingsley repeatedly states the main characteristic involved in the heroic life is when a man raises himself above his own limitation and weaknesses. This is precisely what Bracebridge does not do.
21. Sheila Smith, The Other Nation, p.12.
22. Patricia Hollis (editor), Class and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England, 1815-1850, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p.122.
23. It is worthwhile to compare this account with Margaret Hale's in Mrs. Gaskell's North and South, p.382. There Margaret discourages the unemployed Higgins from travelling down to the South to seek employment. In a rather ironic twist the passage shows the poor have the same romantic views of the country as do the rich.
24. Philip Hobsbaum, A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens, Thames and Hudson, 1972, p.158. Estimates of the yearly deaths caused by cholera and diarrhoea were as high as 20,000 for England and Wales in 1850.

25. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.216.
26. Charles Kingsley, 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty' (1850), included in Alton Locke (1850), Macmillan and Co., 1889, p.xxii.
27. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.184.
28. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, pp.244-245. Here is Carlyle's full appraisal of the novel:

'Apart from your treatment of my own poor self ... I found plenty to like, and be grateful for in the book : abundance, nay exuberance of generous zeal, headlong impetuosity of determination towards the manful side on all manner of questions; snatches of excellent poetic description, occasional sunbursts of noble insight; everywhere a certain wild intensity, which holds the reader fast as by a spell : these surely are good qualities, and pregnant omens in a man of your seniority in the regiment! At the same time, I am bound to say, the book is definable as crude; by no manner of means the best we expect of you - if you will resolutely temper your fire.... Of the grand social and moral questions we will say nothing whatever at present : any time within the next two centuries, it is like, there will be enough to say about them.'

29. Charles Kingsley, 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty', p.xi.
30. Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism', Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, p.151.
31. Una Pope-Hennessy, Canon Charles Kingsley, Chatto and Windus, 1948, p.97.
32. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume I, p.250. Of Catholicism Kingsley once said:

'Now this whole school (though there is very much noble and good in it, and they have re-called men's minds - I am sure they have mine - to a great deal of catholic and apostolic truth which we are now forgetting) is an aristocratic movement in the fullest and most carnal sense. It is a system for saving the souls of fine ladies and gentlemen in an elegant and gentlemanlike way; for making it, the more riches they have, the more easy to enter what they call the kingdom of heaven, and after sitting on high above the masses here on earth, to sit on high above them for ever hereafter.'

33. Barbara Colloms, Charles Kingsley, The Trinity Press, 1975, p.364.
34. E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (editors), The Unknown Mayhew, p.257.
35. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950, pp.111-112.

36. Charles Kingsley, Preface to Alton Locke, 1861, p.xxix.
37. Kendall, p.123. Here Kingsley says: 'Ah, but I have done with writing novels. Henceforth my work will be very different. Please God, I shall devote myself for the rest of my life to showing that there is a living God in nature, and that the God of Nature is one and the same with the God of the Bible.'
38. G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age, Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1960, p.76.
39. Susan Chitty, Charles Kingsley's Landscapes, Latimer Trend and Company, 1976, p.133.

Chapter Six

Charles Dickens : The Philosophy of Christmas

Charles Dickens, the fourth of our writers under review, was the ablest writer and best informed critic of industrialism. The very worst aspects of the laissez-faire society were embodied in the career of his father, John Dickens, a clerk for the Navy Pay Office in Portsmouth. The decline of the family's financial fortunes resulted in imprisonment for debt in the Marshalsea prison in London in 1824. His parents sent the twelve year old Charles to work in Warren's Blacking factory in Hungerford Stairs. This was the single most formative episode in Dickens's life and although he worked there for only six months, he suffered the further humiliation of being separated from his family. These traumatic experiences 'permanently wounded' the young boy's mind - he could only write about these events in fictional form years later - and sharpened his sympathy for social outcasts and for those exploited by the system.¹ Moreover, these early encounters with the competitive society gave Dickens an advantage over the other social novelists and contributed to making him the great writer he was. While Dickens was working at Warren's, Kingsley was composing his nursery sermons at Barnock in comfort.

A second formative experience came at the age of fifteen in 1827 when Dickens was employed in Gray's Inn where it was believed he might pursue a legal career. Dissatisfied with a career in law Dickens taught himself shorthand and became a freelance reporter in 1829. The years spent as a Parliamentary reporter gave him an insight into the mechanics of government procedure, and allowed him to review some of the key legislation regarding reform which occurred in the nineteenth century. As

a reporter Dickens covered the debates of the Reform Bill in 1832, the Poor Law of 1834 and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, all key nineteenth century acts dealing with social reform. These experiences left Dickens extremely critical of government business. When the Houses of Parliament burnt to the ground in 1834, Dickens said the event was symbolic of the country's 'adherence to rubbish'.²

Carlyle and Dickens

A turbulent youth and increasing disenchantment with the structure of society helped turn Dickens to the writings of Thomas Carlyle. In him Dickens found a social thinker whose teachings helped him to understand his past through his present. Dickens gained from Carlyle a Romantic philosophy of man which emphasised man's 'spontaneous and creative side'.³ More than any other Victorian writer he accepted the validity of Carlyle's distinction between the 'mechanical' and 'dynamic', chiefly espoused in 'Signs of the Times'. It was the mechanical aspect after all which Dickens had so bitterly experienced at Warren's Blacking factory. His later accounts emphasised the distasteful methods such labour required:

'My work was to cover the pots of paste-blackening; first with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat, all round, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop. When a certain number of grosses of pots had attained this pitch of perfection, I was to paste on each a printed label; and then go on again with more pots.'⁴

The relationship between Dickens and Carlyle was a relationship between disciple and master. Dickens held Carlyle in the highest esteem, displaying the same sort of deference Kingsley held towards F. D. Maurice.

When he completed The Chimes in 1844 he said he wanted Carlyle to read the work before anyone else did; in 1854 he dedicated Hard Times to him; and The French Revolution was a significant force behind A Tale of Two Cities (1859). Their friendship deepened with the passing years and when Dickens died in 1870 Carlyle said the only greater blow had been the death of his wife Jane four years earlier.

Carlyle's social works greatly clarified Dickens's social vision. Both men had emotional troubles in childhood and knew that a lively imagination had been a strong safeguard against the mechanising process of their education which later they likened to that of industrialisation. Their concepts of the imagination however were very different and these differences were reflected in their social thinking. Carlyle saw the imagination in a mystical way which ultimately sprang from his cultural inheritance from the English and German Romantics. In Sartor Resartus for example Carlyle emphasised the need for a 'mystical' vision and said that the 'man who cannot wonder ... is but a Pair of Spectacles behind which there is no eye'.⁵ Dickens's concept of the imagination, or 'fancy' as he frequently called it, was far less celestial, and within the reach of every man rather than restricted to heroes. For Dickens the 'fancy' was not an aspect of the intelligence as it was for Carlyle; by developing the fancy Dickens felt all men could achieve a healthy balance between labour and life.⁶ Dickens urged his society to have a greater faith in fancy as much as Mrs. Gaskell and Kingsley tried to call the nation back to Christian principles. Dickens's benevolent sentiments have been labelled 'la Philosophie de Noel' and certainly what Dickens said with regard to a periodical he was thinking of producing could be applied to his novels, Christmas books, speeches and newspaper articles:

'Carol philosophy, cheerful views, sharp anatomization of humbug, jolly good temper; ... a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming reference in everything to home and fireside.'⁷

In absorbing Carlyle's social analysis, Dickens's own view of society was deepened. One can sense the change in the tone of the novels in the 1840's where the 'people, places and things become modern'.⁸ Where one can laugh at a prison scene in Pickwick Papers (1837), one certainly cannot have the same response to Little Dorrit (1857), a novel built round the imprisonment theme. The changing tone in Dickens's novels reflects the author's growing social disillusionment. The early novels are further marked by their boundless sense of humour and lack of structure. Pickwick Papers is a series of funny stories with little plot. The social criticism in the earlier works is directed against specific, and as it were incidental abuses, rather than against the basic structure of nineteenth century society. Oliver Twist (1837) is a brilliant exposé of the cold-heartedness of the New Poor Law of 1834; Nicholas Nickleby (1839) is a penetrating attack on Yorkshire cheap schools. Dickens's novels become markedly different in tone once his social understanding has been deepened by Carlyle's influence, and his own experience has made him more keenly aware of a vast and oppressive social and political structure. Significantly, later novels are concerned with the plight of the individual against society.

Obviously with a writer of Dickens's wide scope many of his novels could have been chosen as representative of his social criticism. In particular I think of the multi-dimensional quality of Bleak House (1853) which perhaps more intricately than any of his novels revealed the many aspects of a sick society which slowly destroys its inhabitants. The novels I have selected for discussion, Hard Times (1854) and

Great Expectations (1861), were chosen for the following reasons.

Hard Times was certainly Dickens's most intellectual novel and the only novel where he overtly directed his attention to an attack on the philosophy and economic principles which guided the English ruling classes of the 1850's. The themes of industrialisation and political economy discussed here align Dickens with Carlyle and Mrs. Gaskell, but Disraeli and perhaps even Kingsley were more concerned to preserve the established social order than to bring about social justice. Therefore Dickens's account in Hard Times is a valuable contribution to the social debate and valuable for the sake of comparison with these other writers. The second novel I have selected, Great Expectations, may seem something of a surprise after such a theoretical novel as Hard Times. Great Expectations however is not simply a practical novel and on the contrary I shall argue that here Dickens presents one of the seminal statements about Victorian society and the Victorian class structure. It will be appropriate to conclude this study with Great Expectations because here many of the social themes discussed thus far, notably the notion of class in society, are given their fullest treatment.

Hard Times

Hard Times (1854) was in some respects a fictionalisation of Carlyle's 'Sign of the Times'. The greater part of Dickens's social criticism dealt with the evils of industrial society. Dickens perceived the inherent contradiction which existed between philosophical radicalism and classical economics, where the former advocated the good of the community and the latter stressed the good of the individual.⁹ Dickens feared too that a rationalist mentality which so callously blamed the poor for their poverty and locked them in the workhouse, could also be

selfishly applied elsewhere. Dickens attempted to refute the philosophy of self interest by showing that these principles were incomplete in themselves because they failed to take into consideration man's emotional, ethical and social dimensions.

Dickens was familiar with the factory system and the industrial centres of Britain. Although the majority of his works revolved round London streets, his newspaper work, reading tours and speeches enabled him to travel widely in Britain. He toured the northern industrial areas in the 1840's in an effort to raise money for educational facilities for factory workers.¹⁰ Even when he travelled to America in 1842 he made special efforts to visit factories and some of the major cities like New York, Boston and Philadelphia. The encounters with the giant factories and noisy machines filled Dickens with horror. Like Carlyle he feared that the individuals manning these machines would soon lose their imaginative faculties due to the harsh working conditions and become mechanical themselves. He was so incensed by what he saw in Manchester that he wrote to the poet Edward Fitzgerald in 1838: 'So far as seeing goes, I have seen enough for my purpose, and what I have seen has disgusted and astonished me beyond all measure. I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in 'Nickleby' or wait some other opportunity, I have not yet determined.'¹¹ That 'heaviest blow', sixteen years later, became Hard Times. Dickens saw the factory system as oppressive because the factory huddled men together and imprisoned them. He saw the factory as a consequence of the division of the two nations and therefore sought to expose the evils of industrialism.¹²

The social tension which industrialism brought to the individual has been noted by numerous critics since the novel first appeared in

1854. In Dickens's own day, the art critic John Ruskin proclaimed the work to be on 'a subject of national importance' and the greatest novel Dickens had ever written.¹³ Early this century George Bernard Shaw declared the novel 'a passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world'.¹⁴ More recently F. R. Leavis has stated that Hard Times contains a 'comprehensive vision, one in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilization are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit'.¹⁵

Dickens began writing Hard Times to boost the sales of his magazine Household Words but this does not mean he was unprepared to address the appropriate issues. On the contrary, Dickens's creative energies were turning to social themes. A year prior to the publication of the novel, Dickens wrote an article in Household Words entitled 'Frauds and Fairies', expressing his fears regarding the death of the imagination. A section is quoted because of the similarity in tone to Carlyle's writings and more importantly, to reveal how these ideas found fuller form in Hard Times:

'In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected ... every one who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will hold a great place under the sun.'¹⁶

Another example of Dickens's preparation for the novel was his visit to the industrial town of Preston to report on a cotton mill strike in 1854 prior to the novel's composition. Both factors provided a proper background for the book and what Dickens felt and saw compelled him to write with a sense of urgency. In a letter he wrote shortly after it

was published he said the ideas of the novel 'laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner'.¹⁷

In Hard Times Dickens creates the imaginary factory town of Coketown, probably the most famous manufacturing town in English literature. In Coketown, the 'key-note' of the novel, Dickens makes the philosophy of the factory the prevailing philosophy of education, art and ethics.¹⁸ The laws of classical economics and the 'felicific calculus' of Utilitarianism dominate the internal and external world of Coketown, and the city itself seems to be the embodiment of these principles. Here in this imaginary cotton town the material laws of progress take precedence over the laws of nature. The regimentation of life and the obsession with labour are in startling contrast to the random quality of London life Dickens usually describes.¹⁹ Coketown is undoubtedly the harshest city in all of Dickens's novels, a great advance from the London fog which is an obsession in Bleak House, or the booming commercial world of Dombey and Son. Coketown, like Disraeli's ghoulish Wodgate, is a place where labour cruelly dominates men's lives. Here the tall chimneys, whirring machinery and choking air remind the worker of his endless, inescapable imprisonment. The factories of Coketown recall Carlyle's impersonal world 'void of life, of Purpose, of Volition ... one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam Engine':

'It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness.'²⁰

This depiction of a town which exploited the worker both materially and spiritually was no more severe than other social criticism of the real world. Nor was Dickens far away from the thinking of John Ruskin, who also recognised that brutal working conditions in cities were destructive to the worker. Ruskin voiced concerns similar to those of Dickens in 'The Nature of Gothic' (1853):

'And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this, - that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages.'²¹

Dickens too was horrified by the extent of exploitation in many of the factories. When he received a copy of the Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission the details left him 'perfectly stricken'.²²

Hard Times traces the way the monstrous laissez-faire philosophy of Coketown has penetrated every sphere of life and every sacred tradition. Dickens shows how the impersonal economic theories once restricted to the factory have now been applied to all spheres of life. Coketown is the industrialist's dream. As mentioned, the opening chapters of the novel reveal how economic theory has been applied to the educational practices in Coketown. Here one encounters two of Coketown's most worthy teachers, Thomas Gradgrind, a former tradesman now turned teacher, and Mr. M'Choakumchild, an over-trained teacher. We have met such caricatures before in the shape of Wackford Squeers in Nicholas Nickleby and Dr. Blimber from Dombey and Son. Dotheboys Hall is such a vicious place because there the children are not only physically neglected but also physically abused. Nicholas Nickleby is so outraged

because he knows the children are treated as mere instruments of profit for the Squeers family. Dr. Blimber's school neglects the children in another way, a way more closely aligned to Gradgrindian principles, and both are ridiculed by Dickens. Whereas Gradgrind sees himself as a cannon loaded with facts ready to blow his schoolchildren 'out of the regions of childhood' Blimber is a farmer who treats his pupils as vegetables and picks them before their time:

'... Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances.'²³

Mr. Gradgrind is a utilitarian, a man of 'realities', 'fact' and 'calculation', who doggedly believes that only the statistical element is desirable and purposeful in human development. Gradgrind is one of Dickens's few intellectuals, a man guided by a particular philosophy:

'Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!' (p.47)

The tragic truth is that such question and answer schools as Gradgrind's actually existed for the purpose of teaching the poor their proper place in industrial society. There were the Birkbeck schools which were founded by William Ellis, a disciple of J. S. Mill. Gradgrind was a greater academic monster even than Dr. Blimber.

Dickens takes issue with a myopic philosophy which tragically omits man's imagination. Here Dickens's calculating Gradgrind is exposed to the same type of criticism Swift brought to bare upon the inhabitants of Laputa in Gulliver's Travels (1726) where a society was entirely devoted to the principle of mathematical calculation. Dickens like Swift wanted to show up the short-sightedness of such a philosophy. Dickens creates the highest irony by pointing out that despite Gradgrind's insistent emphasis on calculation, his fault has been a simple matter of addition regarding human nature. His 'character was not unkind, all things considered, it might have been a very kind one indeed, if he had only made some mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it, years ago'. (p.70). Gradgrind's error is in being guided by a theory instead of his own experiences. He detaches himself in a statistical tower surrounded by blue books and a 'statistical clock' and falsely believes he can be adequately guided by impersonal facts and has no need 'to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate'. Much of the novel is spent bringing Mr. Gradgrind and his theories to task.

The opening chapters contain the major contrasts in the novel which become clearer when we see the Gradgrindian philosophy in operation as a new girl, Sissy Jupe, enters the school. Here we encounter a process of 'economic indoctrination' which stamps out all individuality from the children because of the morbid emphasis on facts and statistics.²⁴ The schools of Coketown resemble the impersonal factories, in that the schoolchildren are treated as instruments and machines. Every trace of the imagination is erased. The mill-like process becomes evident when Sissy begins at school and we are allowed to see her first day there. No one can fail to notice the impersonal forces at work when she becomes

"Girl number twenty" and is forbidden to discuss her father's job.

Dickens shows here how the objective materialistic curriculum, while 'claiming to determine only the true facts of the case, actually ends in delusions. The 'factual' interpretation is that Sissy's father is a veterinary surgeon when in truth he is a horserider in the circus. In this school even the horse loses a valid identity in the torrent of facts. In contrast to the innocent and naïve Sissy is the prize pupil Blitzler, who is able unthinkingly to rattle off the desired definition:

'Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.' (p.50)

Even worse is the treatment given to art and ethics. A visiting official from the Department of Practical Art follows the prescribed line in art and is against artistic representation of any kind. This functional approach reduces all creativity and taste to dull and dry facts. He tells the children: 'Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don't see in fact, you are not to have anywhere, what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact.' (p.51) Ethics too loses a personal element in the cluster of statistics. Dickens shows how the statistical approach takes the personal dimension out of decision making when it is applied to human fatalities. Dickens rightly calls this statistical type of thinking 'stutterings'.

Mr. Gradgrind applies to his family the same severity which he administers in the classroom. His wife and children are merely his experiments, and he names two of his children Adam Smith and Malthus, after key figures in his own intellectual armoury. He brings his

children up severely and rushes them off to the schoolroom in their house at the earliest possible age. The children's first memories are not those of singing and playing but of being 'lectured at'. Rather than being able to marvel at the wonder of the circus, the little Gradgrinds occupy their time with scientific tests and chronological tables and this explains the 'jaded sullenness' on their faces.

Gradgrind's domestic experimentation fails miserably because the imaginative dimension has been omitted. Dickens knew as well as any man the importance of the imagination in a person's development. Lacking a formal education himself, Dickens gained a great deal of his knowledge through his own reading and by attending the theatre. Most important were the adventure books he read as a child. Dickens speaks through the character David Copperfield saying:

'My father had left a small collection of books in a little room up-stairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphry Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time.'²⁵

The ultimate failure of the Gradgrind philosophy is shown by the tragic fate of his family. Mrs. Gradgrind's premature death shows that she like Mrs. Dombey dies from emotional neglect. Indeed she says on her deathbed 'there is something - not an Ology at all - that your father has missed, or forgotten Louisa' (p.225). The miserable lives of two of the Gradgrind children, Louisa and Thomas, are even more of a damning indictment of their father's calculated philosophy. We watch the cold impersonal system destroy a healthy brother and sister relationship. Tom loses his sense of moral direction the longer he remains

under his father's tutelage. Desperately unhappy, he turns to gambling and quickly falls into debt, and to pay his debt he robs the town bank. The real tragedy of Tom's downfall is not in the circumstances which prompt his theft. Rather it is the fact that Tom feels no twinge of conscience over the matter. He abstracts the guilt of his actions by appealing to the national statistics which he first learned from his father. 'So many people are employed in positions of trust, so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws?' (p.300). The implication is that facts, used in this twisted way, can prove anything.

Louisa is also psychologically warped by her father's stringent principles. There is no clearer demonstration of the inhumanity of the Gradgrind system than when Louisa is urged to marry for money, an event which reveals the underlying contrast between material fact and emotional feeling. Mr. Gradgrind dispassionately views the marriage as an algebraic formula. Here Gradgrind has the same doctrinaire and unfeeling attitude Morley has when expressing his passion to Sybil. Mr. Gradgrind advises his daughter to dismiss emotional considerations and to consider only the facts of the case. A protesting Louisa finally gives way to her father's advice but it is clear her marriage to Bounderby, so logically sound, is a miserable failure. Whereas Tom seeks an outlet for his boredom in gambling, Louisa considers Harthouse's advances. Both episodes reveal the failing of the Gradgrind system as the failure to recognise the importance of the heart.

In Josiah Bounderby, Dickens satirises the selfish spirit of capitalism. Bounderby is the model self-made man, or at least so he thinks. He is the richest man in Coketown, 'banker, merchant,

manufacturer', who falsely claims to have risen from the gutter. Bounderby considers himself part of the new industrial bourgeoisie and even tries to link himself to the aristocracy, but they are as decayed as he is. Figures of decay include Mrs. Sparsit, his well-mannered housekeeper who spends most of her day dreaming or on errant business, and Lady Scadgers, an immensely fat woman with 'a mysterious leg which refused to get out of bed for fourteen years'.

Dickens shows how Bounderby's claim to self-interest is really a cloak for selfishness. His views, much harsher than Gradgrind's, are based on the competitive principle of exclusion. Dickens shows the inconsistency of Bounderby's outlook by explaining that Bounderby denies others the same opportunity for advancement which he expects for himself. He mistrusts his workers' motives and always feels that they seek more than their fair share. He thinks the desires of his workers are only to enjoy wealth, to eat venison and turtle soup with a gold spoon, and to ride in lavish carriages. Such ignorance about his workers rivals that of the vicious Lord Marney in Sybil who fatally believes the workers on his estate are content with seven shillings a week. Where Lord Marney justifies his actions on the basis of aristocratic privilege, Bounderby ruthlessly defends his actions by means of economic conditions. Bounderby's pursuit of his own self-interest places him in full opposition to another mill owner, Mr. Rouncewell, who appears in Dickens's previous novel Bleak House. Here Dickens draws the same conclusion as Carlyle in Past and Present regarding the Captains of Industry and Plugson of Undershot. There is a correct way to manage factories, Dickens thinks, and a wrong way. Bounderby's statement reveals that he is among those who manage wrongly:

'First of all, you see our smoke. That's meat and drink to us. It's the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs. If you are one of those who wants us to consume it, I differ from you. We are not going to wear the bottoms of our boilers out any faster than we wear 'em out now, for all the humbugging sentiment in Great Britain and Ireland ... Now you have heard a lot of talk about the work in our mills, no doubt. You have? Very good. I'll state the facts of it to you. It's the pleasantest work there is, and it's the lightest work there is, and it's the best paid work there is. More than that, we couldn't improve the mills themselves, unless we laid down Turkey carpets on the floors. Which we're not a going to do ...' (p.159)

Bounderby's selfish treatment of his workers parallels Gradgrind's harsh treatment of his schoolchildren. Dickens shows that both these men are imposters, and the glories of the manufacturing and educational worlds are given fatal blows by their inconsistencies. The appearance of Bounderby's mother, Mrs. Pegler, gives the lie to her son's false claims to independence. The fortunes of the Gradgrind children tragically undermine their father's lofty arguments.

Coketown is a combination of Dickens's fears and memories, the place where all individuality is lost in factory life. Here Dickens details how the workers lose their identity and blend into the bricks and machines which control their lives. The following passage captures the process of human mechanisation:

'The streets were hot and dusty on the summer day, and the sun was so bright that it even shone through the heavy vapour drooping over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Stokers emerged from low underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and palings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam-engine shone with it, the dresses of the Hands were soiled with it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it. The

atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom; and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert. But no temperature made the melancholy mad elephants more mad or more sane. Their wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels.' (p.146)

Dickens's imaginative picture of urban life differs from Mrs. Gaskell's descriptive accounts of individuals. In Dickens the emphasis is on symbols : the bobbing heads of machines, the belching smoke of the chimneys and the deathly black waters of the rivers. Everything is subordinate to the overall theme of regimentation. Mrs. Gaskell on the other hand stresses the human qualities of her characters. There is nothing in Dickens's account of Coketown to compare to Alice's reminiscences in Mary Barton or the sense of duty which Higgins feels towards the union in North and South. And just as Mrs. Gaskell's working class figures are distinguished by the range of their experiences, so too are her pictures of working class homes. I have already mentioned in the Gaskell section how the description of the Bartons' home in the early parts of Mary Barton reveals their prudence in the selection of furniture and food. Again nothing like this is possible in Hard Times because of the controlling theme. In Dickens's efforts to portray the extent of regimentation, his accounts of working class dwellings come surprisingly close to Disraeli's accounts of Warner's dwelling in Sybil:

'It was a room, not unacquainted with the black ladder under various tenants; but as neat, at present, as such a room could be. A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean.'
(p.106)

The only two individuals allowed to emerge out of this hellish environment are Stephen Blackpool and his girlfriend Rachael. Dickens brought forward these two figures to portray the miserable lives of the factory worker. In Stephen Blackpool Dickens attempts to portray the individual plight of an honest power loom weaver who struggles against an oppressive and unjust social system. Stephen's famous phrase 'aw's a muddle' constitutes the indignant feeling of a working man towards a society which tries to squeeze all individuality out of him. This helplessness is later symbolised by Stephen's industrial accident. Dickens does not explicitly mention the concept of the two nations in Stephen's life but it is made clear by implication. The poor live a harsh life in comparison to the rich and operate under a different code of ethics. This contrast becomes clear in the section where Stephen goes to Bounderby for advice about divorce procedures, a section similar to one in Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton when Jem Wilson seeks out Mr. Carson the manufacturer in order to obtain medical forms for a sick friend. Dickens's passage lacks the detail in the comparison between rich and poor, but he still captures the sense of outrage when Stephen learns that divorce is only possible for the rich. Later, when unjustly dismissed by his employer, Stephen's declamations have a remarkable similarity to the opening section of Carlyle's Past and Present:

'Deed we are in a muddle, sir. Look round town - so rich as 'tis - and see the numbers o' people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an to card, an to piece out a livin', aw the same one way, someways, twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, an wheer we live, an in what numbers, an by what chances, an wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis'ant object - ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, an writes of us, an talks of us, and goes up wi' you deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason

in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha
growen and growen, sir, bigger an bigger, broader
an broader, harder an harder, fro year to year,
fro generation unto generation. Who can look on't,
sir, and fairly teel a man 'tis not a muddle?'
(pp.180-181)

Slackbridge, the trade union leader, provides social pressure from within the factory. Slackbridge, like Carlyle's 'Stump Orator' in the Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850) is a 'mouthpiece of Chaos to poor benighted mortals that lend ear to him as to a voice from Cosmos'.²⁶ Slackbridge is the verbal counterpart of Bishop Hatton from Sybil who uses his verbal power to increase social unrest. Dickens could have elaborated on the character of Slackbridge because his visit to the Preston strike enabled him to hear several trade union figures who were reasonable men. One can only conclude that Dickens failed to do so because his middle class sentiments prevailed. Appropriately one critic has commented that Dickens's portrayal of Slackbridge is a 'mere figment' of his middle class imagination.²⁷

It seems clear to me that Dickens made Stephen Blackpool a martyr because he wanted to emphasise the twin evils of, on the one hand, the loathsome tactics of the trade unionists who ostracised Stephen in Coketown and, on the other hand, the cold indifference of the employers who forced him to seek employment in another town.

The antidote to the world of fact is the world of fancy represented by Sleary's circus. The carefree circus is a splendid contrast to the calculated ways of Coketown life. The selection of a circus, however, does not mean that Dickens asks his readers to re-evaluate the foundation of society or advocate that we should tear down our buildings and erect tents in their place.²⁸ Rather, as Carlyle had proposed in Past and Present and as Mrs. Gaskell would do in North and

South, Dickens wanted to blend the ethics of one world with the practicality of the other. Dickens chose the circus because Sleary's group symbolised the spontaneity and wonder which was lacking in the monotonous manufacturing method in Coketown. The circus was a 'brilliant exaggeration' and the perfect embodiment of Dickens's ideas regarding the importance of fancy and the imagination.²⁹ The shared skill and artistry are qualities outside the Gradgrindian calculus. There is 'a remarkable gentleness and childness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving, often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the everyday virtues of any class of people in the world' (p.77).

Sleary, the leader of the troupe, is one of Dickens's wise fools who is the spokesman for the benevolent philosophy which extends back to the Cheeryble brothers in Pickwick Papers and forward to the kind simplicity of Joe Gargery in Great Expectations. The message of the novel, like that of Carlyle's Past and Present, is simply that a nation cannot thrive if it fails to take man's imagination into account. There is irony in that this unsystematised group of animals and clowns provides the one element lacking in Gradgrind's philosophy. The constantly intoxicated Sleary says:

'there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interetht after all, but thomething very different; ... it hath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!' (p.308)

We watch the magical characteristic Sleary cannot name convert and confound the lofty Utilitarian structure chiefly through Sissy who

unknowingly crosses the great divide between the circus and the Gradgrind household. Once there Sissy, who like the true Dickensian heroine symbolises human warmth and love, brings healing. Although Sissy fits badly into the school system her capacity for love confutes the Gradgrindian calculus. That love is stronger than all else is demonstrated by Sissy's penetration of Gradgrind's intellectual armour and Harthouse's complacency. This is not just sentiment Dickens is portraying, but the recreative powers of love.

A final confrontation occurs between the worlds of fact and fancy and notably the circus has the last laugh in the novel. Mr. Gradgrind's son Tom has fled to the circus after the bank robbery and is shortly to be smuggled out of the country to safety. The unexpected arrival of Bitzer and his plans to arrest Tom momentarily delays his departure. Now it is Sleary's turn to pity Mr. Gradgrind's son where in the past Mr. Gradgrind had felt pity for the parentless Sissy. That Bitzer is foiled by a dancing horse, the animal he had so easily defined, reinforces the truth that something fundamental is lacking from his earlier definition. Statistics and facts, although descriptive only, contain bits of the truth, and fail to capture the essence of life.

Great Expectations

The only similarity between Hard Times and Great Expectations (1861) was that both novels were written to rescue the weekly magazines Dickens edited. Great Expectations was written for All The Year Round as Charles Lever's novel A Day's Ride, A Life's Romance was proving to be unpopular with the public and Dickens, ever mindful of his audience, withdrew the work and placed responsibility upon himself to fill the vacuum. The result was one of Dickens's most memorable works and one

of the great novels of the century.

From almost every perspective Great Expectations was the work of a more serious and mature writer. The novel was one of Dickens's shortest and a glowing example of the author's ability to control plot, theme and detail. The novel was perhaps his most serious as was demonstrated by the absence of the usual features of numerous sub plots and characters.

Serialisation of the novel presented the usual excruciating responsibility of weekly installments but the tone of Dickens's letters reveals more confidence regarding the novel's plan than he had with Hard Times.³⁰ The greater ease may have been a result of the autobiographical elements in the novel, as opposed to the attempt to establish the deficiencies of the utilitarian philosophy. An extract from a letter written to his intimate friend and biographer, John Forster, showed how Dickens re-read David Copperfield while writing Great Expectations. Dickens wrote to Forster in September 1860:

'The book will be written in the first person throughout, and during these first three weekly numbers you will find the hero to be a boy child, like David. Then he will be an apprentice. You will not have to complain of the want of humour as in The Tale of Two Cities. I have made the opening, I hope, in its general effect exceedingly droll. I have put a child and a good-natured foolish man, in relations that seem to me very funny. Of course I have got in the pivot on which the story will turn too - and which indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me. To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read David Copperfield again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.'³¹

It had been ten years since Dickens had explored his childhood in David Copperfield and he was now a greatly changed man. He was now

nearly fifty and Copperfield's 'Heavenly light' was tarnished by personal doubt and public embarrassments. His marriage to Catherine was breaking down and he was disappointed with the failed promise of his seven sons and two daughters. He had met a young actress in 1857, Ellen Ternan, with whom he fell in love. He and Catherine separated in 1858 and in the face of a growing scandal Dickens began a vigorous schedule of public readings hoping to 'wear and toss my storm away' which took him to Scotland, Ireland and as far away as the United States.³² That he could continue to write under the professional demands and personal strain was the best demonstration of the author's confident poise.

Whereas Dickens had launched an attack against an intellectually extreme philosophy in Hard Times, here he turned his craft towards the values of society. And whereas Dickens and others had discerned an inherent flaw in the Utilitarian theory, he also discerned similar contradictory elements in the accepted concept of gentility. Great Expectations sought to expose the inherent selfishness and violence which lay behind much of Victorian society and in particular sought to attack the idea of class so dominant in Victorian times.

Dickens was growing increasingly pessimistic about the economic framework of his day and with many of the institutions in the country. It has already been mentioned how acutely sensitive Dickens was about his own class background and his unfulfilled aspirations. These feelings increased with the passage of time and were demonstrated in a statement he made to Forster a year after the publication of Hard Times. 'Don't think it part of my despondency about public affairs, and my fear that our national glory is on the decline, when I say that mere form and conventionalities usurp, in English art, as in English government, and

social relations, the place of living force and truth.³³ Such thinking helps explain the structure behind the novel and tells us why Dickens found true gentility in the country and not the city.

Dickens cleverly designed his novel round the popular parvenu story. The rise of a young boy from obscurity to great wealth was the story of the age and widely circulated among the middle classes by people like Mrs. Craik in John Halifax, Gentleman (1856) and Samuel Smiles in Self-Help (1859). From an early age Pip craves the wealth and worldly success exalted by the majority of characters in the novel, and this plot allowed Dickens to criticise the cruel and excluding forces he felt lay behind the concept of gentility and to establish what the true gentleman was by means of a series of comparisons which take the reader from the lowly rural life on the marshes to sophisticated London. Here Dickens is redefining an old idea of gentility which he believed would make a better society.

The study of gentility begins on the marshes where Pip lives with his sister who has married a blacksmith, Joe Gargery. The adult world surrounding Pip's life at the forge is repressive. Like Alton Locke, whose youth is stifled by evangelicalism, Pip is raised in a world of adult violence, most of which comes from his bad tempered sister, a 'tall and bony' woman 'stuck full of pins and needles'.³⁴ Mrs. Joe has made the situation at the forge difficult for Pip and he has never felt tender towards her. What little pleasure comes Pip's way is usually the result of the father-son relationship with his brother-in-law, Joe, a giant of a man with a gentle heart.

The adult world with the exception of Joe is linked to violence in Pip's mind. Here Dickens skillfully portrays a child's perception,

a heightened sketch resulting from his own childhood. Pip views these figures with the same suspicion that Alton has towards some of the clergymen his mother habitually invites to dinner. Firstly there is Uncle Pumblechook, 'the diabolical corn chandler' who is 'a large hard breathing middle-aged slow man, with a mouth like a fish, dull staring eyes, and sandy hair standing upright on his head, so that he looked as if he had just been all but choked'. Pumblechook is an 'idle and evil' man who takes every opportunity to put Pip down and needlessly reminds him who his betters are. Then there are the Hubbles, a very crusty couple. Mr. Hubble for example has a 'sawdusty fragrance' and believes all children are 'naturally vicious'. Lastly there is the theatrical parish clerk Mr. Wopsle whose large Roman nose always seems to be pointing down into Pip's face. It is clear then that the adult world at the forge is cruel and manipulative. Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook are eager for Pip to go to Miss Havisham's because they hope some financial gain can come of it, by which they will profit. In this way Pip becomes a sacrifice to selfish adult wishes, much as little Paul is offered up in the name of commercialism in Dombey and Son. The pursuit of status is therefore meshed with the lust for financial gain.

The manipulative world of Satis House differs only in degree from the forge. Here Pip meets Miss Havisham when he is invited to play with her step-daughter Estella. In Miss Havisham Dickens brilliantly links gentility with death and money, and thereby establishes the selfish motive in all classes. Miss Havisham has been abandoned by her fiancé on her wedding day and ever since has been emotionally dead. She has stopped the clocks in her house, left the wedding cake to rot and she continues to wear her bridal gown. Her morbid obsession with death recalls the morbidity of Coketown. She is (with the possible

exception of Jo, the crossing sweeper in Bleak House) Dickens's greatest portrayal of a victim of the cash-nexus system.

The key symbols surrounding Miss Havisham and her house are associated with death. Indeed all the imagery inside and outside Satis House evokes the imagery of death. In the neglected garden only traces of vegetables remain. Elsewhere there is an abandoned brewery. Darkness in the house cannot hide the wedding preparations; the decomposing wedding cake, cobwebs and spiders. But although Miss Havisham is dead to the world, she is alive to the harm she can cause to others. Having been a victim herself, Miss Havisham seeks revenge against the male sex by using Estella as her instrument.

At Satis House Pip meets a faded view of gentility. Here gentility has to do with power and privilege and nothing to do with the traditions of noblesse oblige. On Pip's first visit he is made keenly aware of his social inferiority by Estella's condescending references to his boots, hands and working class background. Pip feels the same humiliation as Alton Locke does when on his visit to Cambridge he is pushed in the river.

Although Pip feels humiliated by Estella's insulting remarks, he is fascinated by the 'rich and grim lady' Miss Havisham and charmed by the 'beautiful and self possessed' Estella. Estella's remarks reinforce Victorian class distinctions and Pip seeks to overcome his feeling of 'thwarted potential'.³⁵ Knowing little else except that he is unhappy, Pip decides he wants to be a gentleman. He tells his friend Biddy:

'Biddy, said I, after binding her to secrecy, 'I want to be a gentleman.' 'Oh, I wouldn't, if I was you! she returned. 'I don't think it would answer.' 'Biddy,' said I, with some severity, 'I have particular reasons for wanting to be a gentleman.' 'You

know best, Pip; but don't you think you are happier as you are?' 'Biddy,' I exclaimed, impatiently, 'I am not at all happy as I am. I am disgusted with my calling and with my life. I have never taken to either, since I was bound. Don't be absurd.' 'Was I absurd?' said Biddy, quietly raising her eyebrows; 'I am sorry for that; I didn't mean to be. I only want you to do well, and to be comfortable.' 'Well then, understand once for all that I never shall or can be comfortable - or anything but miserable - there, Biddy! - unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now.' 'That is a pity!' said Biddy, shaking her head with a sorrowful air.' (pp.154-155)

Pip's desire to better himself is motivated by the wrong reasons for he wishes to be a 'gentleman' only to conquer Estella. Gentility is therefore not linked to proper behaviour but rather to buying and selling. This money theme becomes all the more prominent when Pip receives his great expectations.

Pip's move to London marks another phase in the novel's treatment of the relationship between gentility and money. The entry of the lawyer Mr. Jaggers signals the beginning of an affluent life style for Pip and makes possible the fulfilment of every wish that he has ever entertained. Mr. Jaggers is Dickens's portrayal of the worldly professional of the city who only seems to be a gentleman. Jaggers is every inch a lawyer, a man representing the law before whom all clients tremble. His reputation for getting his man is so widely known that he never needs to lock his windows or doors. He is much feared and in court not even the judge can stop his method of ascertaining the facts.

As with Miss Havisham, so beneath Jaggers's veneer of respectability lie selfishness and guilt. Jaggers is called a 'gentleman' the first time we meet him descending the stairs in Satis House yet the pitiful truth about Jaggers is that he selfishly uses the law to his

own advantage. In fact long ago he has misdirected justice in the case of Estella's mother Molly, a murderess whom he shrewdly defended in court and retained afterwards as his greatest legal trophy. Jaggers and justice in fact come together rarely and to win a case he even considers bribery. Hidden behind Jaggers's legal logic is a guilt ridden man. Like Pontius Pilate, Jaggers ceremoniously scrubs his hands after a day's work in an effort to absolve himself from guilt by association. The strongly scented soap only cleanses him externally when what is needed is a clean heart. Like Pilate, Jaggers sends many to slaughter. His office is located in Little Britain, a decaying community which makes Bleeding Heart Yard in Little Dorrit attractive by comparison. Symbolically this is a place of death and the 'dismal atmosphere' leaves Pip feeling suffocated. Jaggers's relationship with Pip is one of deception; although he is the only figure who knows the true source of Pip's wealth, he does not reveal it. In supplying cash as opposed to moral guidance, Jaggers contributes to Pip's false ideals.

Against the background of these competitive figures, Dickens presents his own concept of the way people should live and it is in marked contrast to the stagnant gentry of the countryside or the crafty professionals of the city. In Great Expectations Dickens presents a concept of the gentleman which combines the benevolence of Kingsley's muscular heroes and to a far greater extent the practicality of Carlyle's ideal working man.

Dickens shows that the true gentleman has little to do with social class, education or money. These issues, the novel says, are of no significance and can do little to change us. The novel teaches a mature self acceptance buoyed by a conscious regard for others, a

contrast to the fixed and jaded lives of Jaggers and Miss Havisham.

In the good qualities of Joe Gargery, Herbert Pocket, Mr. Wemmick and Magwitch, Dickens presents what he believes is the true and valid meaning of the gentleman. Joe Gargery is an example of the hard working countryman who is content with his small and secure place in the social order. Joe is a blacksmith but no ordinary blacksmith. He is a man who combines incredible strength and humility, powerful enough to smash a skull, but gentle enough to pat an egg. Joe has a natural kind of wisdom and instinctively knows the difference between right and wrong. Pip may have been a better speller, a better man of letters, but it is Joe who has a deeper insight into life. Dickens cleverly gives the blacksmith the role of social investigator instead of a middle class character.

Joe tutors Pip as Sandy Mackaye has tutored Alton Locke. He teaches Pip an unsophisticated morality, and demonstrates a regard for humanity. When Magwitch confesses that he stole some food Joe expresses compassion towards the man and we realise who formed Pip's values:

'God knows you're welcome to it - so far as it was ever mine,' returned Joe, with a saving remembrance of Mrs. Joe. 'We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creature. - Would us, Pip?' (p.71)

Such a humble country view is at odds with the commercial world of London. In London the cash-nexus and social etiquette have replaced ordinary human values. This point is especially emphasised during Joe's trip to London which contrasts the refined ways of the city with the rugged ways of the country. Joe has insight into the source of the problem:

'You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private,

and bekknown, and understood among friends. It ain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me nor more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe.' (p.246)

Pip learns in time the hollowness of his own aspirations and falls ill after discovering the identity of his benefactor. This places Pip on the right path towards gentility and allows Pip to see more clearly Joe's true humanity. In the moment of Pip's vulnerability Joe's full humanity comes forth and he nurses his old friend back to health. In the blacksmith's tenderness, Pip finally sees the real meaning of the gentleman:

'After I had turned the worst point of my illness, I began to notice that while all its other features changed, this one consistent feature did not change. Whoever came about me, still settled down into Joe. I opened my eyes in the night, and I say in the great chair at the bedside, Joe. I opened my eyes in the day, and, sitting on the window-seat, smoking his pipe in the shaded open window, still I saw Joe. I asked for cooling drink, and the dear hand that gave it me was Joe's. I sank back on my pillow after drinking, and the face that looked so hopefully and tenderly upon me was the face of Joe.' (p.472)

In contrast to Joe is Orlick, the other worker at the forge. Whereas Joe represents all the domestic virtues of the forge, Orlick embodies the coarseness which Pip seeks to escape. It is not difficult then to see in principle why Pip wishes to leave the dismal atmosphere of the marshes and to become a gentleman. Ironically when Pip arrives in London he meets Bentley Drummle, an Orlick in gentleman's clothes. Drummle has all of those qualities to which Pip aspires. He is a 'gentleman' from Somerset and possesses wealth and has Estella for a wife if only for a short time. Even with Drummle's title, cigars and

carriages there is still a strong element of beastliness in his character, as with Orlick. This side is shown when he assaults Estella and in his accidental death as a result of beating his 'horse'. A further irony is that the energy which allows Pip to struggle and free himself from the forge, has in turn its own violence. One of the truths Pip must learn is that the refined society he wishes to enter is governed by a corresponding brutality. There is no escaping the fact that to make one's way up the social scale involves violence of one sort or another. For much of the novel Pip mistakenly believes he is free from such struggling, and attributes his own fortunes to personal merit. In reality however Pip's status as a 'gentleman' has to be won by Magwitch whose toil overseas allows Pip to flourish in London. The idealised picture of the 'gentleman' who does not have to labour with his own 'hands' is therefore destroyed. Such considerations explain why Magwitch's return is such a soul-shattering experience for Pip. He is unable to free himself from the violence which surrounds the forge. He remains the 'prowling boy' with the blacksmith's arm who fells Herbert Pocket, the 'pale young gentleman'. At the same time Pip is also repulsed by what he aspires to enter and he returns to the simple truths surrounding Joe and the forge a broken man.

Earlier when Pip travels to London he has an opportunity to see real gentility and his introduction to Herbert Pocket marks a further stage in this development. Pip's relationship with Herbert is from the start marked by the same snobbery he has shown towards Joe. When they share lodgings in London one of Pip's first thoughts about Herbert is that he will never 'be successful or rich'. Dickens brings Pip and Herbert together for comparative purposes. Both men entertain the highest hopes in life but their differences are obvious. Pip's wishes

amount to nothing more than a refined parasitism; having so much money that he does not have to work. Herbert by contrast wants to insure ships and dares to fulfil his dreams. The difference in outlook is further shown when Pip and Herbert try to solve a mounting debt problem between them. Pip's careless advice, based upon his endless allowances from Jaggers, is simply to 'stare them out of countenance'.

Yet Herbert is the greater man, a natural gentleman like Joe, who on the whole lacks the pretension which grows in Pip. The difference between Herbert and Pip is best shown by their opposing reactions to the same event. When Pip arrives in London it is Herbert who teaches him good table manners:

'Let me introduce the topic, Handel, by mentioning that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth - for fear of accidents - and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning, only it's as well to do as other people do. Also, the spoon is not generally used overhand, but under. This has two advantages. You get at your mouth better (which after all is the object), and you save a good deal of the attitude of opening oysters, on the part of the right elbow.' (p.203)

A similar situation arises when Joe comes to visit Pip in London but as we have seen the results are entirely different. Pip is embarrassed by Joe's 'architectooralooral' discussions and bad table manners.

At this point Herbert has more in common with Joe than Pip has, for both see the customs of society for what they are, and realise that the essence of a man has little to do with the clothes he wears and the way he speaks. Herbert is more mature than Pip and is not carried away by the outward trappings of wealth or physical beauty as Pip so easily is.

No amount of education or money can hide a man's true nature, Herbert thinks, 'no varnish can hide the grain of wood, the more varnish you put on, the more the grain will express it'.

John Wemmick is another gentleman figure who avoids Jaggers's guilty past by having two codes of conduct at the home and at the office. A clever man, Wemmick plays the role society expects of him. There is little difference between him and Jaggers at Little Britain, where all business and only business is dealt with with repetitious efficiency. Wemmick's private life is an entirely separate matter, one he has successfully concealed from Jaggers. Apart from work at Walworth, Wemmick is quite the individualist and lives in a castle he has designed himself. Wemmick has a separate life he can call his own and this is the great difference between him and Jaggers. He has not allowed the business world to rule his life or ethics. This is demonstrated in several ways. At his castle Wemmick is well away from the city and faithfully nurses his aged father, tends his garden and even falls in love. These domestic arrangements are in sharp contrast to the moribundity of Satis House and Jaggers's jaundiced world. Wemmick, unlike his employer, offers Pip good advice when he needs it and later helps plan Magwitch's escape. The contrast between Jaggers and Wemmick is another example which demonstrates the importance of the imagination.

Pip cannot fully become a gentleman until all his bourgeois illusions have been shattered and this is precisely what occurs when Pip learns the identity of his patron. A rejection of society's false values and an acceptance of new ones is a standard pattern which the social novelists frequently use, in the hope that their audience would go through a similar process. A major point in Yeast and Sybil is that the two chief figures, Lancelot and Egremont, have to learn that their

school-bred views of 'Merrie Old England' are false and that in fact the poor suffer greatly. Mrs. Gaskell makes the same point in the character of Henry Carson in Mary Barton, who can only be shaken out of his statistical conception of his workers by his son's murder. Magwitch's return destroys the false picture Pip has created for himself and more importantly allows Pip to see how false is his understanding of the gentility he has unsuccessfully pursued thus far.

The revelation that Magwitch is the provider of Pip's fortunes staggers the young man because this makes his social training a paradox, a costly form of entertainment. Pip's patron is not after all a rich lady but instead a criminal. Magwitch is the embodiment of everything from which Pip has tried to free himself; the marshes, the violence and his own unhappy past. Ironically Magwitch is the progenitor of each of Pip's expectations, financial, sexual and cultural.

In the life of Magwitch there is further comment on the theme of the gentleman, but also some additional comment on the problem of the two nations. Magwitch's concept of the gentleman and the 'two nations' problem is inseparable. Magwitch like Pip has been the victim of society's harshness, but to a far greater degree. Magwitch has been manipulated by both individuals and society. He is used as a tool by Compeyson, an upper class criminal, and then discriminated against by the law because of his coarse and common ways. On the other hand Compeyson receives a lighter jail sentence because he feigns gentility and looks the part.

Out of revenge against this arbitrary social conduct Magwitch attempts to build the gentleman he could never be. In doing so Magwitch follows the pattern of many middle class Victorian fathers including

Dickens himself who sent their legitimate sons to the new Public schools. Paradoxically Magwitch's illusions of gentility are essentially the same as Pip's. Magwitch comes to view Pip as his own creation, as a living piece of property which he claims as his own. While the other colonists sought land and stock, Magwitch made his gentleman. The one's sweat allows the other's comfort and Magwitch could justifiably say: 'I lived rough that you should live smooth, I worked hard that you should be above work.' (p.337) The concept of the gentleman, linked with money and the exploitation of one class over the other, must therefore be reconsidered. Such a juxtaposition - the poor man making the rich man's life possible - recalls other cries of injustice. Alton Locke heard the same from a group of starving and unemployed agricultural workers. Outside the social novel one could also cite the increasing number of anti-capitalist writers who began pointing out the unjust relations between labour and capital. Instead of moving towards radicalism, however, the novel adopts the theme of social reconciliation. Pip's initial 'repugnance' disappears as he guards the convict and in 'the hunted, wounded, shackled creature' he sees a person who acts 'affectionately, gratefully, and generously'. The 'veil' between them is lifted and where once Pip dispassionately watched Magwitch go off to prison, he now feeds and nurses him.

Pip's sympathy towards the convict marks the key turning point in the novel. While attempting to escape Magwitch is seriously injured and subsequently imprisoned by the police. From then on Pip and Magwitch stand alone together against the world. Pip's new sense of caring is visible in his daily visits to the prison, his tending the convict, and their holding hands. Magwitch is obviously moved:

'Thank'ee dear boy, thank'ee. God bless you! You've never deserted me, dear boy!' I pressed his hand in silence, for I could not forget that I had once meant to desert him. 'And what's the best of all,' he said, 'you've been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all.' He lay on his back, breathing with great difficulty. Do what he would, and love me though he did, the light left his face ever and again, and a film came over the placid look at the white ceiling. 'Are you in much pain to-day?' 'I don't complain of none, dear boy,' 'You never do complain.'" (p.469)

True gentility finally comes but in a way which Pip never thought possible. When Magwitch dies all of his money is claimed by the Crown which leaves Pip penniless. Defeated and humbled by his past, Pip chooses to live a modest and quiet life by working in Herbert's firm. For Pip the wheel has turned full circle and where he began at Joe's side, he finishes by Herbert's side. True gentility, the novel concludes, means humility, kindness, consideration and diligence in one's task.

Yet ironies exist within the world of the novel which remain unresolved. Although the novel stresses the moral side to gentility this is shown in some cases not to be enough. Joe is a 'gentle Christian man' yet he cannot protect Pip from Mrs. Gargery's buffetings. Herbert Pocket on the other hand can only start his business with Pip's money. No simple solution to the 'two nations' problem is given and instead the novel ends with a resolve to live quietly and to be good within one's small sphere rather than contribute to a world governed by violence.

Conclusion

Hard Times and Great Expectations were two powerful novels representative of Dickens's later works, which minutely dissected Victorian

society and examined the broad issues of industrialisation. Dickens was addressing the middle classes with these novels and by writing about places like Coketown or people like Stephen Blackpool and Magwitch, he was serving a vital purpose in informing the audience that these places actually existed and further that these people had a story to tell. More importantly Dickens's novels also had a moral to pass on. Using the very broadest of Christian ideals, Dickens offered a message which was easily accepted and understood by all. His benevolent characters, like figures in stained glass, taught a simple message of charity in an era when traditional values were being eroded by industrialism. Sleary's circus and Joe's forge were striking images to set against the changing Victorian landscape. In using these figures Dickens was not asking his readers to believe in childish tales. For all that Great Expectations does advocate the values of Joe Gargery as a 'gentle Christian man' there are indications in the novel that gentleness may not be sufficient as a code. Joe after all cannot protect Pip from his sister's beatings or society's greed. This reservation makes Great Expectations perhaps Dickens's most sombre novel. Yet in the last analysis Dickens reaffirms gentleness, compassion and charity and recommends these ideals for society. It is these character traits which signify the real 'gentlemen' and are the means by which greater bonds can exist between men. Joe, for all his simplicity, has the power to place Pip back on a proper course. In the revised ending Pip and Estella, both 'bent and broken, but ... into better shape', leave the novel with the promise of marriage.³⁶ Weaker but yet wiser they join the growing list of repressed figures in Dickens's later novels whose experience of life falls short of their expectations.

Footnotes to Chapter Six

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16. Norman Page, A Dickens Companion, Macmillan Press, 1984, p.185.
17. Sheila Smith, The Other Nation, p.231.
18. See K. J. Fielding's 'Dickens and the Development of Practical Art', Modern Language Review, Volume XLVIII, 1953.
19. Raymond Williams, 'Social Criticism in Dickens. Some Problems of Method and Approach', Critical Quarterly, Volume 6, No.3, Autumn 1964, pp.214-227.

20. Charles Dickens, Hard Times (1854), Harmondsworth, 1969, p.65. All references to this edition.
21. John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic' (1853), in The Victorian Prophets, p.183.
22. Michael Slater (editor), 'The Chimes : Dickens's Tract for the Times', Dickens 1970, p.101.
23. Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (1848), Harmondsworth, 1970, p.206.
24. See Robin Gilmour's 'The Gradgrind School. Political Economy in the Classroom', Victorian Studies, Volume XI, No.2, December 1967.
25. Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (1850), Harmondsworth, 1966, p.70.
26. Thomas Carlyle, 'Stump Orator', Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850), Chapman and Hall, 1872, p.149.
27. George Bernard Shaw, 'Introduction to Hard Times', The Dickens Critics, p.132.
28. This position is taken by Raymond Williams in Culture and Society 1780-1950, Chapter Five, 'The Industrial Novels'.
29. Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, Volume 2, pp.130-131.
30. Norman Page (editor), Dickens Hard Times, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend, Macmillan Press, 1979, pp.28 and 91.

Compare the following letters. The first is to W. H. Wells, the assistant editor of Household Words, 18th April, 1854:

'I am in a dreary state, planning and planning the story of Hard Times (out of materials for I don't know how long a story), and consequently writing little ...'

The second letter is written to John Forster in September 1860:

'For a little piece I have been writing - or am writing; for I hope to finish it to-day - such a very fine, new and grotesque idea has opened upon me, that I begin to doubt whether I had not better cancel the little paper, and reserve the notion for a new book.'

31. Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, Volume 2, pp.318-319.
32. Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens (1970), reprinted by Panther Books, 1983, p.216.
33. Sheila Smith, The Other Nation, pp.249-250.
34. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (1861), Harmondsworth, 1977, p.40. All references to this edition.

35. Robin Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel, George Allen and Unwin, 1981, p.134.
36. Pip's and Estella's promise of marriage is far removed from the confidence of the marriages which end in Disraeli's Coningsby and Mrs. Gaskell's North and South.

Conclusion

In the previous sections I considered the social novelists as a group of writers with widely different social and religious backgrounds who responded to the literary challenge Thomas Carlyle had laid down in 'Chartism', that 'something ought to be said' regarding 'the condition and disposition of the Working Classes', by using the novel to address social problems as well as to propose solutions. These writers were urged to write by the poverty they could see in the streets or read about in the Parliamentary reports. In addition they were united in their attack against the intellectual ideas of Utilitarianism and classical economics which appeared to defend these conditions.

Throughout I have tried to pay close attention to the relevant biographical factors in each author's life and also to show how each writer arrived at a social philosophy which later surfaced in his or her fiction. I have done so because each of these novelists is more directly and explicitly concerned with what is or is not desirable in the organisation of society than most writers are. In trying to emphasise the social dimensions I realise I have not discussed the full range of each novel. Throughout the writing of my thesis I have always felt straight-jacketed by the term 'social novel' because that phrase stresses the social aspect of the novels at the expense of the artistic. I am similarly uncomfortable with the repeated use of the phrase 'social novelist' because it does not take into account the other kinds of fiction or other kinds of writings these authors produced. What I discuss concerning the social novelists represents only a small part of their social fiction in the wider sense.

The social novelists were important writers because they were some of the very first novelists to express their doubts concerning the social values of political economy. In dealing with national issues such as poverty and Chartism, these writers tried to evoke a wider humanitarianism and greater sense of social responsibility. In addition, they were some of the first writers to discuss working class life and habits. They were, however, limited in the degree to which they could analyse Victorian society. Although the social novelists were children of the industrial age, their intellectual and emotional allegiances were to an older form of society, and they were nervous about the radical changes of the period : understandably so, since during their lifetime they saw British society change to an almost unimaginable degree. Caught between the values of the old world and the modern age, the social novelists believed they could solve the 'condition of England' question simply by interjecting the values of the past into the present. They would have agreed with Carlyle's statement in 'The Present Time' that a social formula needed to be found which did not cut loose 'human ties' but rather helped bind people and classes to one another.¹ Further, by appealing for legislation to deal with a range of specific problems, the social novelists were displaying their fundamental belief in the class structure system. Like Edwin Chadwick and James Kay-Shuttleworth, they believed most social evils were remediable and that society could be improved by the removal of a few incidental abuses. What J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth said in 1832 could be said to apply to each of the social novelists and Mrs. Gaskell in particular:

'The evils here unreservedly exposed, so far from being the necessary consequences of the manufacturing system, have a remote and accidental origin, and might, by judicious management, be entirely removed.'²

Generally each of these writers offered a paternalism of one form or another which usually involved the aristocracy, clergy or benign manufacturer in the place of the old feudal lord.

At the same time tensions are felt within several of the novels which indicate that the social novelists at least began to question the existing social structure. There are scenes where they are noticeably uncomfortable in the criticism which flows from their pens and which they try to retract. Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton is the clearest example because the novel so strongly portrays Barton's suffering as a consequence of Carson's wealth, a feeling many of the reviewers did not miss either. Mrs. Gaskell aims to say that the system only needs to be better understood by the lower classes but the reader gets the impression that the system is unfair. The ambiguity is evident in another respect. It is not clear if Mary Barton means to comment on Carson's ignorance in assuming the validity of his economic principles, or on Barton's ignorance in failing to recognise their validity. It is not precisely clear where the fault lies. The reader then can only view Mrs. Gaskell's apology for claiming not to understand economic theory as a sign that she was backing down under pressure. A similar discrepancy is seen in Kingsley's Alton Locke. The riot scene presents a variety of working class grievances, before the meeting goes out of control and becomes an uprising. Kingsley, recalling his own experiences of the Bristol riots, wants to establish that Alton's decision to urge the crowd on to riot is wrong, but he is never able to do so because the reader, like Alton, is too convinced by the pleas of the poor.

A distinguishing trait of the social novelists is their strong sense of realism. There are a number of reasons for this. Carlyle's writings helped to focus all attentive minds on the conditions of

society; so too did those investigative reports which as we have seen particularly affected Disraeli and Kingsley. These two factors combined to force the problems of society into the pages of fiction. Realism became a tool for the social novelist because the realistic aspect of a novel could be used to influence opinion. Kingsley's literary advice to George Brimley in 1857 could well extend to all the writers under discussion:

'You must, as you so well remark, have people talk, as people do in real life, about all manner of irrelevant things, only taking care that each man's speech shall show more of his character, and that the general tone shall be such as never to make the reader forget the main purpose of the book.'³

Realism was important to these 'real life' writers because this enabled them to put fact into their fiction. By doing so they brought the findings of the Royal Commissions into the drawing rooms of many houses in Britain. Instead of adopting the official tone of these reports, the social novelists recovered the particular lives and stories buried beneath the sea of facts or else wrote vividly about the poor based upon their own experience. The atmosphere they created must have been electric and produced the same responses as did the other investigative reports. Thackeray's reaction to one of Mayhew's articles was surely the same kind of response the social novelists must have caused: 'But of such wondrous and complicated misery as this you confess you had no idea? No. How should you? - you and I - we are of the upper classes; we have had hitherto no community with the poor.'⁴ Perhaps they should be applauded more than anything else for their unified effort to give the poor a voice, and often a central voice, in their fiction. In attempting to do so they confronted some major literary hurdles.

Firstly in describing the poor they were crossing sacred social boundaries and trying to depict the lives and habits of a community they were not part of. Secondly, in discussing the working classes, they were forging a new tradition because they had no prior literature on which to model their own writing. Nevertheless despite these difficulties they were able to offer a great deal of insight regarding the customs, complaints and attitudes of the working man. As we have seen some were more effective than others in their descriptions. Disraeli had the greatest distance to travel when it came to describing the poor. He may have been one of the first writers to mention the 'two nations' (he was surely the one who popularised the idea), but there is much doubt in my mind as to how much of the working class way of life he actually understood. It is too easy to recognise the traces of blue books beneath his fiction and it is clear from his stale and lifeless scenes of poverty that he could not breathe life into what he had read. In Disraeli's reliance upon the official reports one cannot help comparing him to his own fact-ridden figure Rigby, in Coningsby, or to Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind. The inclusion of rick burning, torch meetings and the riot scenes in Sybil leads me to conclude that Disraeli was trying to capitalise on the sensational quality of the clamouring poor, evident in much of the literature of the time. He was after all an aspiring politician and out to make a name for himself.

With the other writers, the poor receive a more sympathetic treatment and what Disraeli can only hint at, they meticulously detail. Mrs. Gaskell, unlike Disraeli, had no political aspirations; nor did her domestic duties allow her time to read the parliamentary reports. Whereas Disraeli looked up, Mrs. Gaskell looked down and concentrated her attention on the Mancunian poor. Instead of writing sensationally

about them as Disraeli did, she wrote sympathetically, and with a greater emotion than the other novelists. More than any other of the social novelists, she leaves the impression of having succeeded in writing 'truthfully'.

Kingsley perhaps takes the middle ground between Disraeli and Mrs. Gaskell. The working class scenes in Yeast are one-dimensional, like Disraeli's, yet in Alton Locke Kingsley gives a picture of the struggling poor which rivals Mrs. Gaskell's. As a minister of the church and keen advocate of public health, Kingsley wanted to shock the consciences of his complacent readers and provoke them into benevolent action. He knew he was providing grotesque details when he discussed disease and pollution in country and city and in Yeast he told his audience he wasn't lying:

'Then let the reader believe, that whatsoever is commonplace in my story is my own invention. Whatsoever may seem extravagant or startling is more likely to be historic fact, else I should not have dared to write it down, finding God's actual dealings here much too wonderful to date to invent many fresh ones for myself.'⁵

Such authenticity can only be attributed to the wide number of social sources available to Kingsley. His parish work in Eversley and frequent lectures with the various working men's colleges gave him the opportunity to learn extensively about the rural and urban poor.

Dickens, our last writer, was like an alchemist who created his own world from the various components of official and personal sources. His knowledge of the poor in London was second to none and came as the result of his own involvement with prisons, slums and schools. Like Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens saw the poor as individuals, and that he gave working class figures key parts in his novels was perhaps the best

evidence of his sympathy; *Oliver Twist*, the Tootles, Little Jo, Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, as well as Stephen Blackpool, Rachael and Joe Gargery are each proof that Dickens was the champion of the poor. Indeed Dickens once stated: 'I have great faith in the Poor; to the best of my ability I always try to present them in a favourable light to the Rich.'⁶

Taken together the social novelists offered a wide ranging account of industrialism which provided accurate and often humane pictures of the working class in rural and urban settings. The scenes of the two young boys digging turnips in Alton Locke, Davenport's cellar dwelling in Mary Barton, or Pip running along the marshes in Great Expectations are only three of many memorable and moving accounts. Mrs. Gaskell's John Barton and Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* come the closest to breaking free from the sentimental or stereotypic strictures placed upon them. For these reasons then we can dismiss George Orwell's claim that if 'you look for the working classes in fiction, and especially English fiction, all you find is a hole'.⁷ He obviously had forgotten the social novelists and most certainly Mrs. Gaskell's novels, because her working class characters more than any other are concerned with those who 'make the wheels go round'. Her pictures of John Barton, Job Legh and Ben Davenport are convincing accounts of ordinary working men.

One glaring omission in these industrial novels which must be mentioned is the failure of the authors to tackle the problem of factory work, certainly one of the keynotes of their era. The factory abuses are always distanced. At no point do we actually enter into a factory and breathe the poisoned air which kills Bessy Higgins. Even the details regarding Bessy's life come by means of her own narration

rather than the reader's direct experience of it. Disraeli's factory scenes fall into the idealised pattern which constitutes much of his novels. Trafford's factory in Sybil is only a literary creation and part of Disraeli's antidote to places like Wodgate. In Coningsby the author presents a fantastic view of a factory town. There we are told the hero of the story:

'... entered chambers vaster than are told of in Arabian fable, and peopled with inhabitants more wondrous than Afrite or Peri. For there he beheld, in long-continued ranks, those mysterious forms full of existence without life that perform with facility, and in an instant, what man can fulfil only with difficulty and in days.'⁸

There is only one reference to a factory in Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton, and this is more imaginative than informative:

'Dark, black were the walls, the ground, the faces around them, as they crossed the yard. But, in the furnace-house a deep and lurid red glared over all; the furnace roared with mighty flame ... Then, black figures, holding strange-shaped bucket-shovels, came athwart the deep-red furnace light, and clear and brilliant flowed forth the iron into the appropriate mould. The buzz of voices rose again; there was time to speak, and gasp, and wipe the brows; and then, one by one, the men dispersed to some other branch of their employment.'⁹

North and South provides the most detail about factories but this comes through Thornton's or Higgins's mouth. The closest Dickens gets in Hard Times is to the dirty bricks and chimneys of Coketown. We learn more of the exterior than the interior. Kingsley in all fairness knew little about factories and was primarily concerned with light industry. This omission must be attributed to the social novelists' general confusion about industrialism, which led them to accept the material benefits factories produced but yet at the same time to rebel against the terrible working conditions.

As well as wanting to put fact into fiction, the social novelists wanted to turn fiction into fact. Realising the power of the printed page, for they themselves were influenced by reading, the social novelists sought to persuade others. They wanted their readers not only to be informed about the condition of society but also to follow the same patterns of discovery and reaction as their central characters. By placing in fiction what they hoped would become fact, the social novelists believed they were taking the first steps towards the resolution of the nation's social and political problems. Disraeli and Kingsley wrote specifically for the purpose of reviving an enlightened aristocracy. The characters of Egremont and Lancelot are identical in the sense that both figures are trained to be the nation's leaders. Their growth into responsible aristocrats takes place only after they leave their comfortable estates and enter into the real world. Egremont's decision to disguise himself and live among the working classes and Lancelot's tour of the neighbouring villages, are the central points in these characters' experiences. The image of the rich coming down to help the poor cannot be missed. Another important element is that both figures become preoccupied with questions regarding their 'social rights and responsibilities'.¹⁰ Disraeli's and Kingsley's heroes are usually great talkers who argue with nearly everyone in the novel. In Yeast for example Lancelot has lengthy debates with the aristocracy, his Catholic cousin, Argemone and Tregarva. The novelists wanted their readers to start talking too, and similarly to come to a deeper understanding of society.

Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens employed similar techniques but their writings were directed towards developing a broader outlook among the middle classes. Disraeli and Kingsley wanted to shake the aristocracy

down from their comfortable towers, Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens wanted to teach the middle classes that it was wrong to hold rigidly to economic principles which exalted theory over the individual. These, as I have shown, were the very lessons Mr. Thornton and Gradgrind must learn. Together then these novelists stressed the human side in either an active aristocracy or in a humane brand of capitalism. The emphasis on the 'dynamic' side to man's character and not the 'mechanical' was evidence that Carlyle's words had made a deep impression. In an age hallmarked by the growth of machines Disraeli wanted to restore the position of the crown and the aristocracy and Kingsley to redeem society with a rugged religion, while Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell wanted to replace calculating manufacturers with benevolent ones.

What the social novelists were not able to put into discussions they tried to evoke through symbols. Carlyle had written about the importance of symbols in Sartor Resartus but these lessons were hardly necessary to a group of writers accustomed to biblical metaphors. Disraeli had a high church position, Dickens and Kingsley were broad churchmen whereas Mrs. Gaskell was a dissenter. The repeated use of marriage to suggest a new union between classes and cultures, with which half of the novels conclude, has been succinctly described as a 'compromise between romance and sociology'.¹¹ Failing to find social harmony in reality, they resorted to ideals. To conclude a novel with wedding bells also provided a means of escape for these writers. Certainly one of the major criticisms which can be lodged against the social novelists is that they failed to show what their characters were to do after they got married or stopped asking social or political questions.

I would like to finish by discussing what sort of impact these writers with a purpose made upon mid-Victorian society. Did they

succeed or fail in their self-appointed task to influence opinion? The question is difficult to answer. As could be expected, the social novelists made their biggest inroads among the middle and upper classes, which is where they found most of their readers. Among Victorian intellectuals they received a mixed reception. After Hard Times was published for instance, J. S. Mill voiced his displeasure with the novel and novelist by saying 'that creature Dickens'.¹² Lord Macaulay dismissed the novel as 'sullen socialism' in a flourish reminiscent of Mr. Podsnap.¹³ On the other hand other Victorian intellectuals found much to praise in these writers with a purpose. After Kingsley's death in 1875 Matthew Arnold wrote a letter of consolation to Kingsley's daughter assuring her that her father's 'fine talents and achievements in literature will now have full justice done to them'.¹⁴ John Ruskin regretted that Dickens spoke in 'a circle of stage fire', but believed every one of his novels was 'entirely right' in 'drift and purpose'.¹⁵

A similar mixed response occurred among the general readership. There were readers who were outraged by the radical tones of Mary Barton and Yeast and threatened to cancel their subscriptions or else voiced their objections in various newspapers or journals. Then too there were those readers who were grateful for what these novelists had written because they provided paths to follow in difficult times.

Nor can one ascertain the general impact these novels made upon the workers themselves. Only a minority of working men had either the time, interest or skills to read these novels. The working class had its own literature and probably felt suspicious regarding the novel. Such was the feeling of the Chartist John James Bezer whose involvement with the Christian Socialists soon led him to attack the leadership of the group. In particular Bezer was offended by the way Chartism was

portrayed in Alton Locke as 'a laughing-stock as well as an abomination' and he tried to correct this middle class interpretation in an article which appeared in one of the final issues of 'Politics for the People'.¹⁶

It is perhaps impossible to decide the impact of the social novel; the information we have suggests too wide a variety of responses. Perhaps it is best to view the social novelists as part of the investigative and interventionist process which was making its mark in government and in religious movements, as well as in literature. Whatever their limitations the social novelists must be commended for their efforts to come to grips with the 'two nations' problem. In seeking to describe the experience of industrialism in the novel they became the pioneers of a long literary tradition. In the economically buoyant third quarter of the century, the 'social novel' was less in evidence, but it began to re-emerge in the 1880's and 1890's as George Gissing, Walter Besant and Arthur Morrison began to explore 'darkest England'. The emphasis was now on urban rather than industrial problems; the mood was darker, the narrative strategies were different. Nevertheless, Gissing in The Nether World (1889) and H. G. Wells in Tono Bungay (1909) found themselves, like their predecessors of the 1840's and 1850's, compelled to take up the 'condition of England' question; and, like them, to draw upon their resources of courage, creativity and compassion in meeting the challenge of their time.

Footnotes to the Conclusion

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2. J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (1832), found in The Idea of the City in Nineteenth Century Britain, edited by B. I. Coleman, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, pp.67-68.
3. Mrs. Francis E. Kingsley (editor), Charles Kingsley His Letters and Memories of His Life, Volume II, pp.39-40.
4. Anne Humphreys (editor), Voices of the Poor, Frank Cass and Co., 1971, p.ix.
5. Charles Kingsley, Yeast, p.15.
6. Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens, p.181.
7. George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens' (1940), Inside the Whale, reprinted in Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays, Harmondsworth, 1981, p.82.
8. Benjamin Disraeli, Coningsby, p.179.
9. Mrs. Gaskell, Mary Barton, p.276.
10. Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p.123.
11. Tillotson, p.122.
12. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, p.105.
13. George Otto Trevelyan, The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay (1876), Two Volumes, Oxford University Press, 1932, Volume II, p.307.
14. Mrs. Kingsley, Volume II, p.471.
15. John Ruskin, Unto This Last, found in The Dickens Critics, pp.47-48.
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